

**FROM KHYBER TO OXUS**  
**A Study in Imperial Expansion**

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# Preface

Anglo-Afghan relations in the nineteenth century have been the subject of much discussion. Generals posted on the frontier, administrators in the solitude of Simla and latter-day historians have written profusely on the theme. Some have extolled the 'noble savage' in the Pathans; others have romanticised the might of the British Raj; and still others have busied themselves in following the intricacies of Kabul politics. Such studies have, however, been essentially mono-dimensional, concerning themselves primarily with the relations between the Indian government and the Amirs of Kabul. Little attention, if any, has been paid to the Central Asian and European aspects of the Afghan question.

The present study, dealing with the crucial period from 1869 to 1880, seeks to correct the perspective and aims at an original presentation of the Afghan problem. The British in India, as elsewhere, had their legends, myths and heroes. But behind these lay the concrete realities of trade and diplomacy. If an expanding market for British goods was the goal, Afghanistan by virtue of its striking location on the map provided an ideal entrepot. If the object was to launch offensives in Central Asia, the co-operation of the Afghans was indispensable. Russia was both commercial competitor and political enemy, though it was not as great a threat as it was made out to be. Thus the Afghan question involved three distinct relationships : those between Kabul and Calcutta, between St. Petersburg and St. James', and between London and Calcutta. The Afghan commitments of the Indian government were not always consistent with the exigencies of European politics, while the interpretation of British interests in Central Asia could vary sharply from London to Calcutta. The tensions of these relationships make an interesting study. Afghan reactions to European expansion add a further dimension to the problem but any assessment of

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# Afghanistan and the Afghan Problem

The Afghan Question was the chief preoccupation of the foreign policy of the British in India all through the nineteenth century. It is almost incredible that the politics of a relatively backward community like Afghanistan could, for so long a period, hold and pin down British attention. In fact, for generations, Afghanistan remained a political barometer of British influence in the Middle East. Expeditions were sponsored to upset its rulers ; factions of the Kabul Durbar were subsidised ; agents, both native and European, dressed as dervishes, roamed the Afghan hills and frequented the border bazaars, engaging in espionage and subversion ; even the zenanas of the royal household were caught up in the system of intrigue. The 'great game', as these activities are often romantically termed,<sup>1</sup> was obviously both expensive and hazardous, and evidently the problem must have been acute. Both the India and the Foreign Offices were constantly bombarded by minutes, memoranda and despatches penned by officials in India and experts at home, dwelling on its varied dimensions. Perhaps much of Britain's concern was due to the instability of Afghan politics. In contrast, the comparative stability of Persian politics and society, along with the international recognition of her position as such, had provided a basis for direct communication. The Anglo-Russian agreement to respect the integrity of Persia, together with British supremacy in the Persian Gulf which counterbalanced her rival's superior strength in the North, had introduced certain elements of caution and moderation in British thinking towards Persia. Although there were

1. Cf. H.W.C. Davis, 'The Great Game in Asia', *Pros, British Academy*, Vol. XI (1927), p. 19. Also, a graphic account in J.W. Kaye, 'History of the War in Afghanistan' (3rd edn., London, 1874) ii. ch. 2.

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RAWALPINDI

KOHAT

KHAOL

BAMB

HELmund R.

FARAB R.

CHARUD R.

MURGHAB R.

HARI RUD

HERAT

KUHSAN

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MESHED

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Externally, her problem was one of sheer survival. In contrast to the general unifying religious factors, the socio-geographical features of Afghanistan tended to be divisive. Nature itself had made integration of the Afghan nation difficult. Mountains and stretches of desert separate the country into distinct regions with more or less well-defined tribal and ethnic preponderances. Economically, therefore, Afghanistan presented the spectacle of an archipelago in which the islands of activity were connected by tenuous routes of communication, many of which became impassable in bad weather.<sup>5</sup> The way of life of the various regional communities was determined almost entirely by local natural conditions, and this in turn brought about local loyalties and cultural differentiations. The existence of Afghanistan as an independent nation was not long-standing and had been occasioned only by the decline of the Mughal and Safavi empires, which had for a long time divided between themselves the territory now known as Afghanistan.

Balkh, to the north, was essentially Uzbeg, and its incorporation within Afghanistan was no more than a military achievement of Ahmad Shah<sup>6</sup> and indeed the Hindukush ranges to the north of Kabul stood as a permanent reminder of its alien complexion. Even within Afghanistan proper, tribes predominated which were racially and linguistically closer to the tribes of Bukhara and Khorasan.<sup>7</sup> In fact, the tribal cohesion brought about by Ahmad Shah was not cemented by the necessary political and social processes along which relationships between social groups might have been channellised.

As for her external relations, Afghanistan, though strong for defence towards the east, was open to attack from the west and the north. Herat had always been considered the key to her defence in the west, and Persia, since the accession to the throne of her Kajar

5. D.N. Wilber, '*Afghanistan—Its people, Its society, Its Culture*', New Haven, 1962, ch. I. Also see, P.G. Franck, '*Afghanistan between East and West*', National Planning Association, May 1960, p. 9.

6. Ahmad Shah Durrani, founder of the modern Afghan State, (1747-73).

7. A detailed study of the tribes of Afghanistan lay beyond the scope of the present work. For such discussion, see M. Elphinstone, '*An Account of the Kingdom of Caubul and its dependencies*', Books III, IV, and V, Vol. II, London (1839); H. W. Bellew, '*The Races of Afghanistan*', London, 1880; A. Burnes, '*Travels into Bokhara*', 3 vols., London, 1835. For more recent work, see G. Jarring, '*On the distribution of Turk tribes in Afghanistan*', Leipzig, 1939; Arnold Fletcher, '*Afghanistan, Highway of Conquest*', New York, 1965, chs. II and III; Olaf Caroe, '*The Pathans 550 B.C.—A.D. 1957*', London, 1965, Part I.

energetic spirits<sup>2</sup> advocating action, there was no room for an official acceptance of a 'Shah Suja Policy' for Teheran. Afghanistan, on the contrary, had always been classed by the Home government as a part of the general question of Central Asia—a virtual no-man's land—over the fate of which negotiations might be conducted and bargains struck, in complete indifference to the native authorities.

Yet, if the politics and 'civilisation' of Afghanistan fell far short of the Foreign Office's requirements for direct dealing, the importance of her geopolitics could hardly be underrated. She commanded the routes that linked India with Central Asia. Her ill-defined frontiers touched Persia, Merv, Bukhara, China and, of course, British India. Few in India or in Britain had any accurate knowledge of the programme and designs of the Russian generals at Tashkent or at Asterabad. There were serious misgivings as to the ability of Afghanistan to stand together or even as to the means of getting the Afghans reconciled to a British umbrella. Here was a problem which both in its complexities and far-reaching implications transcended its local characteristics. Certainly many would have liked to view it as a purely Indian affair. But most men in power did not fail to discern its extra-Indian complexion. The frontier problem of the Government of India was closely interlinked with the imperial calculations of the Home government, so much so that it was difficult to distinguish the one from the other. Here lay the weakness of an arrangement based on a 'neutral zone' as put forward by Clarendon<sup>3</sup> as well as the futility of the bold local initiative proposed by Lytton.<sup>4</sup>

In a sense the Afghan Question was basically more Afghan than British. Internally, political disunity was the key to her history.

2. For example, Sir John McNeill between 1838-1842 despatched a succession of scouts to the Jarbar countries: Todd, Conolly, and Stoddard to Herat, Kokand and Bukhara; Abbott and Shakespear to Teheran. *Ibid.*
3. Villiers, George William Frederick, fourth Earl of Clarendon and fourth Baron Hyde (1800-70), entered the diplomatic service; attache at St. Petersburg 1820; a commissioner of customs, 1823; ambassador at Madrid, 1833-9; lord privy seal, 1839-41; president of the Board of Trade, 1846; lord-lieutenant of Ireland, 1847-52; Foreign Minister, 1853-8, 1865-6 and 1868-70.
4. Lytton, Edward Robert Bulwer, first Earl of Lytton (1831-1891), statesman and poet, private secretary to Lord Dalling at Washington and Florence; paid attache at The Hague and Vienna; secretary of the embassy at Paris, 1872-4; British minister at Lisbon, 1874; Viceroy of India, 1876-80; ambassador at Paris, 1887-91.

dynasty, had never ceased to maintain her claim to the Khorasan province wrested from her by the founder of the Durrani empire. Since the time of Agha Muhammad Khan<sup>8</sup> she had recovered the whole of Khorasan, except the district of Herat. It was a fairly confident speculation that if a favourable opportunity occurred Persia would again actively pursue her claims in that direction. Balkh, similarly first wrested from Bukhara by Ahmad Shah Durrani, had never ceased to be claimed by the parent State, and more than once during the troubles affecting his crumbling empire, had actually returned to Bukharan possession. Its conquest by the Afghans had always been of an unsatisfactory nature and Takhtapul, built as a capital by Afzal Khan in 1850, was the only point in it securely held by Kabul.<sup>9</sup> Under these circumstances the detachment of these provinces from Afghanistan would not have been a matter of serious difficulty, especially in the event of internal civil war.

Nevertheless, despite the essential diversity of Afghan society and politics, Afghanistan continued to live an independent life, however compromised it might have become under the pressure of the two European imperial systems which steadily approached her from her south-eastern and north-western flanks. The remarkable Afghan resistance to such an apparently irresistible trend of European expansion must be studied in terms of the structure of Afghan loyalties.

In writing of the relations of Britain with Afghanistan, no error could be greater than that of considering the people of Afghanistan either as a homogeneous nation or as a collection of vertical tribal loyalties. A few preliminary words may not therefore be amiss on the broad ethnological features that characterise the four subdivisions of the country—Kabul, Kandahar, Herat and Turkistan.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the people of Afghanistan comprise a variety of ethnic groups of diverse origin, as might be expected of a country which has since the earliest times been a corridor for people finding their way

8. Ruler of Persia, belonging to the Kajar Dynasty, 1794-1797.

9. H.W. Bellew, 'A consideration of the present Anglo-Russian position in Central Asia, 24 June 1875', Memoranda, C. 42.

10. Of Turkistan it is sufficient, for the present purpose, to say that it was not an Afghan country at all. Its population, with the solitary exception of a Ghilzai colony, settled about Balkh a few generations earlier, being exclusively Uzbeks, Hazaras and other Mongol tribes or Iranians as in Badakshan. For details see J. Talboy Wheeler, 'A Memorandum on Afghan Turkistan', Calcutta, 1869, M.P. 6.

to India. These people always left their mark on the language or on the peoples of present-day Afghanistan in some way. The result is a very variegated language and population-map of the country. Of these ethnic groups the most dominant are the Afghans and Pathans, who, according to the statistics available to the Government of India in the 19th Century, formed more than half of the population of the country and also constituted the most articulate section of the nation. Putting aside the frontier tribes, who, though Afghans or rather Pathans, were classed by the Durranis with Parsiwans and Ghilzais as 'oprah', or strangers, and were for the most part semi-independent, the remainder of the Afghans nation was divided into two important groups, Durranis and Ghilzais. Practically the whole of the former were located in the provinces of Herat and Kandahar, while a smaller proportion lived in the Peshawar Valley. Before the time of Nadir Shah the Ghilzais inhabited much of the country west and north of Kandahar, the western limit of the Durranis, then termed Abdalis. But the Ghilzais were turned out of their territory by the Persian conqueror in favour of the Durranis, who gradually ousted the majority of the original Tajik cultivators, and also pushed northward the Mongol Hazaras from the fertile valley of Tirin into the more remote corners of the central mountain ranges. The Durranis gradually spread up to the Persian frontier and to the west of the Kharhrud, where they lost their Pushtu speech together with much of their Afghan roughness and turbulence and became indistinguishable from the Tajiks. In fact, with their settlement in warm fertile low-lands, the Durranis generally appeared to have lost those military qualities which in Nadir's time had distinguished them from their compatriots in the north-east.<sup>11</sup> The eastern Afghans whom Elphinstone and other earlier writers called 'Berdooranees'<sup>12</sup>—namely the Yusufzais and other kindred tribes of the Peshawar plain and the valley to the north of it—were less amenable to the Persian tradition largely because their cultural contacts lay with the Mughal Empire and with Peshawar and Kabul<sup>13</sup>.

East and south-west of the city of Kabul lay the country of the Ghilzais, between whom and the Durranis of Kandahar a feeling of implacable hatred existed. They were a tougher and more warlike

11. For Durranis, see authorities as in footnote 5. Also, cf. O.B. St. John, 'Memorandum on Southern Afghanistan', 1 November 1879, Ly P. 10.

12. Elphinstone, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, ch. 1.

13. Olaf Caroe, *op. cit.*, p. XV.

race, though in the south-west, nearer to Durrani territory, these characteristics were less marked, the Tokhis and Hotaks of Khelat-i-Ghilzai being decidedly less warlike than the Ghilzais of the north. The Ghilzais were probably the most numerous and possibly the most valiant of all the Afghan tribes.<sup>14</sup> Close examination of Afghan traditions, customs and tribal genealogy reveals that the Ghilzais' claim to be of pure Afghan stock is dubious. They obviously include foreign blood which had forcibly imposed itself upon the Afghans, taking their women in marriage, and adopting Afghan customs and the Afghan language in the process. It is also obvious that some of the Eastern tribes of the Pushtu-speaking zone, commonly known as Pathans, like the Lohanis, Marvats, Waziris and Dotanis, belong to the same stock as the Ghilzais of the interior. So too do the Surs, the Lodhis and the Khaljis who at one time or another founded dynasties in Delhi.<sup>15</sup>

The Pathan tribes on the eastern frontier of Afghanistan never fell under the effective sway of any imperial system, but both commercially and traditionally they were linked more closely with the cities and towns of the Indus and with the Afghans of the Peshawar Valley and Kabul than with the Persianised Durranis of the west.<sup>16</sup> Thus in the central and eastern regions of Afghanistan there developed a sense of attachment and an identity of interests which, though it did not crystallise into a national unity, obviously transcended tribal consciousness in most cases. This was fostered by a common linguistic heritage and inspired by memories of past imperial domination. The traditions of Bayazad Ansari and the Roshniyas, and of Buner Sayyads,<sup>17</sup> gave them a sense of belonging which the great Afghan poet Khushal Khan Khatak<sup>18</sup> reinforced with a sense of purpose and an Afghan pride.

Apart from the Afghans and Pathans there was another ethnic group in Afghanistan, commonly and collectively known as the Tajiks. These were the descendants of the ancient conquerors of the country and the most important tribes were the Eimaks of Herat, the

14. For Ghilzais see 'Some particulars regarding Afghanistan and Shere Ali' by Capt. Gray, 9 May 1870, M.P. 5i, along with authorities in footnote 7.

15. Olaf Caroe, *op. cit.*, ch. I. Also see Gray, 'Some particulars regarding Afghanistan etc.', 9 May 1870, M.P. 5i.

16. Olaf Caroe, *op. cit.*, p. XV.

17. For Roshniyas and the Akhund Orthodoxy, see *ibid.*, chs. XIII and XIV respectively.

18. *Ibid.*, ch. XV for the career and traditions of this Afghan poet.

Tajiks of Kandahar and the Qizzilbashes of Kabul. The Qizzilbashes were the descendants of a military colony established by Nadir Shah at Kabul, and formed a distinct Persian community of the Shia persuasion against the native population who belonged to the Sunni sect.<sup>19</sup> Of the Hazaras and Eimaks, Bellew wrote that these people who were of Mongol origin had adopted the Persian language and Shia doctrine of Islam as early as the 13th century.<sup>20</sup> One thing distinguished the Tajiks and Qizzilbashes from the other tribes : they formed the commercial and industrial class of Afghanistan and together with a few Hindus in the towns played the role of a very effective pressure group in Afghan politics.<sup>21</sup> In terms of loyalties, theirs were more occupational than tribal, and in times of '*badshahgardi*'<sup>22</sup> they would hasten to make contracts with factions amenable to their group interests.<sup>23</sup>

The modern political history of Afghanistan, like the modern political history of Central Asia generally, may be said to commence with the death of Nadir Shah in 1747, which was followed by a period of destructive anarchy when his empire finally broke up altogether. One of the new political systems which emerged as a consequence was that of Afghanistan under one Ahmad Shah of the Abdali tribe, hereafter known as Durrani. Throughout the eighty years that the Suddozai Empire lasted,<sup>24</sup> it was based entirely on the allegiance of the Durranis who formed a powerful aristocracy, possessing valuable privileges, and retaining their tribal organisations intact. Even in the midst of their frequent internal dissensions they seem to have combined forces against the Ghilzais whenever the latter rose in rebellion.

As long as the seat of Government remained at Kandahar, the Durrani chiefs went on receiving their share of the country's revenues and holding all positions of power, while the Amir was only *primus inter pares*.<sup>25</sup> It was, however, becoming more or less obvious that

19. Jarring, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

20. Bellew, *op. cit.*, p. 115; cf. Jarring, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

21. J.P. Ferrier, '*History of the Afghans*', London, 1858, pp. 321-322.

22. A most expressive term meaning literally 'King-turning' or a period of dynastic strife.

23. Cf. their role during the civil war which led to the rise of the Barakzais in Ferrier, *op. cit.*, pp. 132-133 and 140-142.

24. The best history of the Durrani Empire may be seen in Elphinstone, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Appendix A, pp. 279-352; Ferrier, *op. cit.* More recent works are Fletcher, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-71 and Caroe, *op. cit.*, pp. 249-306.

25. Compare similar conclusions in Major St. John, 'Memorandum on Southern Afghanistan', 1 November 1879, Ly P. 10. Also Elphinstone, *op. cit.*, II. Appendix A. Also ch. II, pp. 251-254.

Afghanistan would not be able to retain its independent identity and control of the far-flung territories under a tribal hegemony. Ahmad Shah had employed the Ghilzais and other less sophisticated tribes in the north and the east in conquering and consolidating his empire.<sup>26</sup> His son Timur had set up a Ghilzai front against the tribal pretensions of the powerful chiefs of Kandahar and the transfer of the capital from Kandahar to Kabul was designed to cement relations with the non-Durrani tribes.<sup>27</sup> The Barakzais had appreciated the political importance of the Qizzilbashes and Ghilzais in an Afghan Empire and they encouraged social intercourse with the non-Durrani tribes.<sup>28</sup> In this context the parentage of Dost Muhammad is not without significance.<sup>29</sup> Nor can one overlook the role of the Qizzilbashes in the revolution which led to the transfer of power from the descendants of Ahmad Shah to the sons of Payindah Khan, the chief of the Muhammadzai clan of the Barakzai Durranis.<sup>30</sup> During the course of the reign of Dost Muhammad of Kabul, even the Tajiks and the Lohanis were won over to the cause of the Barakzais by a liberal commercial policy.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, it is somewhat misleading to consider the pattern of Kabul authority as a combination of vertical tribal loyalties. The power structure of Barakzai rule had a surer basis than the Durrani hegemony of earlier days. Of course, there was still considerable scope for intrigue against a particular ruler. Tribal loyalties were rampant, especially below the small pyramid of the power elite at the Kabul Darbar.<sup>32</sup> The support of the commercial class was hesitant, as the Tajiks were soon to find that they were not free from the non-economic demands of their traditional overlords.<sup>33</sup> Besides, the Amir was reluctant to allow his position to be challenged by a wealthy commercial class once tribal loyalties could no longer be invoked to buttress his authority. Yet, when all is said, it cannot be denied that Barakzai despotism was generally accepted by the large majority

26. *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 299. Ferrier, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-95.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 97-99. He also organised a standing army of Qizzilbashe regiments.

28. *Ibid.*, pp. 144, 322.

29. Dost Muhammad's mother was Qizzilbashe. Ferrier, *op. cit.*, p. 144.

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133 and pp. 140-142.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 322.

32. See for the intrigues and rebellion of Ghilzai faction during Sher Ali in Capt. Gray, 'Some particulars regarding Afghanistan etc.', 9 May 1870, M.P. 5.

33. Ferrier, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

as a superior political mechanism to the Durrani alternative.<sup>34</sup> Shah Shuja<sup>35</sup> might still be brought to Kabul: but the Dost had to be restored. Lytton could have overthrown Sher Ali; but it was only a Yakub or an Abdul Rahman who would have solved the dilemma of political leadership.<sup>36</sup>

The British, particularly after 1784, were most sensitive to the possibility of an invasion of India through the mountain passes of the north-western frontier. Almost from time immemorial, the idea of invasion through the Afghan passes had haunted the princes and people of India. The only seriously vulnerable point along her frontiers was in the extreme north-west, on her borders with Afghanistan and Baluchistan. This was a fact which no statesman could have forgotten. Four years after Clive had laid at Plassey the foundation of the Indian Empire, the Afghan monarch Ahmad Shah Abdali entered Delhi and annihilated the Maratha armies at Panipat and the fears of fresh invasions long continued to trouble the minds of the Company's administration.<sup>37</sup> The rise of Napoleon, French intrigues with the Indian courts and Persia, and the warlike disposition of the Afghans only sharpened this fear. The initial attempt of the British to counteract such a menace was directed towards Teheran and Sind, where the success of the British missions, sent at the behest of the Governor General, Marquis Wellesley, tended temporarily to assuage British fears.<sup>38</sup> But the collapse of the treaty of Amiens of 1802, and the conclusion of the treaty of Tilsit of 1807, revived dormant apprehensions, and the threat of a combined Franco-Russian project through Persia seemed imminent. British influence had dwindled at Teheran since the treaty of Turkomanchai of 1828 and the failure of the British to come to Persia's assistance in her hour of

34. Capt. Gray, 'Some particulars regarding Afghanistan etc.', M.P. 5.

35. The last of the Suddozai Durrani rulers of Kabul.

36. See ch. VII of the present study.

37. H.W. Bellew, 'A consideration of the present Anglo-Russian position in Central Asia', 24 June, 1875. Memorandum C. 12. See also, H.C. Rawlinson, '*England and Russia in the East*', London, 1875 ch. 1. For a study of Russophobia in England, J.H. Gleason, '*The genesis of Russophobia in Great Britain*', Harvard, 1950, is interesting.

38. See, Kaye, '*History of Afghanistan*', *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 1-68, especially 63-8 for Malcolm's missions. Also, Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, ch. I. See, for the British diplomacy in Sind, R. Huttenback, '*British Relations with Sind 1799-1843*', California, 1962, ch. 1.

need.<sup>39</sup> The general sense of alarm in Britain may be gauged by the almost frantic instructions issued by the Home authorities urging the Governor to take precautions to thwart any hostile movement across the Indus and 'to cultivate to the Utmost of your power the favourable opinion and co-operation' of all states beyond the frontier and even of the 'tartar tribes to the Eastward and Caspian'.<sup>40</sup> Few had the inclination to assess the logistics of a supposed French-inspired expedition through Afghanistan and Sind. Minto,<sup>41</sup> the then Governor General, however, had kept passions under control.<sup>42</sup> On the contrary, he urged that an alliance system with the frontier states to counteract French influence was both an essential and adequate move. He acted accordingly and the mission headed by M.S. Elphinstone was sent to organise the Afghan side of the defensive network. The civil war in Afghanistan, however, terminated Elphinstone's mission abruptly and the treaty which was signed with the Afghan ruler was killed by default.<sup>43</sup>

British relations with Afghanistan assumed a new dimension when fear of foreign invasion in the early eighteen-thirties again emphasised the strategic importance of the area.<sup>44</sup> Russia had been rapidly extending her power in Asia : she had achieved complete mastery of the Caspian ; she had occupied the northern province of Persia, imposed on that country the most onerous peace conditions and by 1836 her influence in Teheran had become paramount. 'The Directors', wrote Lord Ellenborough, 'are much afraid of the Russians, so am I...I feel confident we shall have to fight the Russians on the Indus'.<sup>45</sup> The apprehensions of public figures of the day were much strengthened by the publication of Colonel De Lacey Evans'

39. For the general decline of British influence at Teheran and the success of Russian diplomacy, see 'On Persian Policy', O.T. Burne, undated; also see 'Memorandum on Persia etc.' by Mayo, 29 December 1871, both in M.P. 5.

40. Board's Secret Drafts, March 2, 1808. Quoted in Huttenback, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

41. Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto, Governor General of India.

42. Countess of Minto (ed.), *'Life and Letters of Gilbert Elliot, First Earl of Minto, from 1807-1841'*, London, 1880, p. 51.

43. The most tangible result of Elphinstone's mission to Afghanistan was the production of the invaluable work on the kingdom of Kabul, *op. cit.*

44. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-204. Also George Nathaniel, Marquess Curzon, 'Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question', London, 1889, p. 325. Kaye, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-160.

45. Edward Law (Lord Ellenborough), *A Political Diary 1828-1830*, London, 1831, Vol. II, p. 92.

book '*On the Designs of Russia*'. Evans explained in great detail how the Russians could effect a successful invasion of India through Afghanistan.<sup>46</sup> Shortly before, Dr. James Burnes had aroused by his report, '*A Narrative of a Visit to the Court of Sind*', great interest in the potentialities of the Indus and of Sind, although somewhat optimistically.<sup>47</sup> Schemes for the commercial exploitation of the Indus and the countries beyond were not unwelcome to William Bentinck, who in 1828 held the reins of government in India.<sup>48</sup> The spirit of commercial and political competition with Russia which was growing in India was directed, as Ellenborough put it, to encourage British traders to replace their Russian counterparts.<sup>49</sup> The events of 1836 incensed the British and drove them in a frantic effort to forestall their political and commercial rival in Central Asia.<sup>50</sup>

The failure of the British and the Russians in the early forties to assume military ascendancy in Central Asia had fixed for a time the

46. Lt. Col. De Lacey Evans, '*On the Designs of Russia*', London, 1829,
47. 'The river Indus', he wrote, 'might once more become the channel of communication and wealth between the interior of Asia and the peninsula of India, while Sind herself.....would rise renewed to claim a due importance in the scale of nations, and to profit by her benefits which nature has bestowed on her.....A single glance at the Indus will show the easy passage to the very heart of the (Afghan) dominions, which the river offers to a maritime power.' James Burnes, '*A Narrative of a Visit to the Courts of Sind*', London, 1827, p. 120.
48. For the influence of Burnes' ideas of commercial expansion on British policy towards north-west frontier during this period, see Huttenback, *op. cit.*, chs. 2 and 3. Also, H.T. Lambrick, *Sir Charles Napier and Sind*, Oxford, 1952, especially pp. 28-29. Bentinck himself wrote: 'The results (of Burnes' mission) has satisfied me that the importance of the river Indus, in a political point of view not less than as a route of commerce, has not been overrated.' Quoted in Huttenback, *op. cit.*, p. 23.
49. Edward Law, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 144, 150, 153.
50. For the events of 1836-38, see the two interesting official memoranda: L. Mallet, 'Historical Summary of the Central Asian Question' C. 84, Memoranda. O.T. Burne, 'Historical Summary of the Central Asian Question', C. 9 Memorandum. J.W. Kaye, '*History of the War in Afghanistan*' (3 vols), London, 1851, remains the principal authority of the Afghan war. The following official memoranda of the Political and Secret Dept. of the India Office may be consulted: O.T. Burne, 'Russia in Central Asia', C. 23; Lord Tenterden, 'Analysis of Blue Books on Central Asia', 1838-79, C. 21; O.T. Burne, 'Historical Summary of the Central Asian Question', C. 9; L. Mallet, 'Russia and England in Central Asia', C. 84. See also E.R. Kapadia, 'Alexander Burnes' Mission to Kabul', *Journal of Indian History*, Vol. 44, 1944, for this role of Burnes.

nature of Central Asian diplomacy. Under the influence of the extremely cautious and Europe-directed foreign policy of Nesselrode, the Russians preferred to keep the fluid and favourable situation in Central Asia as inoffensive to British interests as possible. In response, the British adopted a low profile in trans-frontier politics, for fear of arousing Russian complaints. Sind and the Punjab offered to the British more immediate complications, while the Russian position in Central Asia proved to be less stable than had been expected. The cessation of active diplomacy over Central Asia following the Afghan war was merely a recognition of the realities of the situation.

Under the pressure of these new attitudes Anglo-Afghan relations assumed certain distinct characteristics. So far as India was concerned, a disintegrated Afghanistan as opposed to the idea of a united British protectorate, was looked upon as providing the necessary power-equation conducive to her security. A neutralised Persia, direct dealing with the frontier tribes over the head of the Amir, and relative calmness with regard to Russian expansion constituted the remaining requirements of the policy.

This was the beginning of a protracted foreign policy which, in its heyday, was both hailed by the supporters and denounced by its opponents in the phrase 'masterly inactivity'.<sup>51</sup> Its chief protagonists were the Punjabee officials who in their drive for efficiency often overlooked the importance of native leadership. Its high priest was Sir John Lawrence,<sup>52</sup> and its chief shrine was the closed border system of the Punjab frontier.<sup>53</sup> In substance, the purpose of the

51. J.W.R. Wyllie (Foreign Secretary, Government of India), 'Masterly Inactivity', *Fortnightly Review*, July-December 1869, XII.

52. Sir John Lawrence, (1811-1879), joined East India Company Civil Service in 1829; commissioner of Trans-Sutlej States, 1846; acting Resident at Lahore, 1846-48; in the Punjab Board, 1848-52, second in command to Henry Lawrence; Chief Commissioner of the Punjab, 1852-59; member of the India Council, 1859-64; Viceroy of India, 1864-69; upon retirement brought to the forefront by aggression on Afghanistan in 1878.

53. For an exposition of the closed border system as developed under the Punjabee officials, see H.H. Dodwell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of the British Empire*, Vol. V, Cambridge 1932, ch. XXV; C.C. Davies, 'The problem of North-West frontier 1890-1908', Cambridge 1932, ch. I; Bosworth Smith, 'Life of Lord Lawrence', London, 1883, Vol. I, ch. XIII; Olaf Caroe, *op. cit.*, ch. XXI. See also Memorandum by Bartle Frere in Lytton Papers on the Punjab and Sind traditions, February 1876, LyP.3.

Punjabee tradition in trans-frontier relations was to protect the frontier from Pathan depredations by an effective military administration under strong proconsuls. The vigilance of the 'marcher lords' was to be supplemented, if possible by a divided Afghanistan, thereby neutralising the ambitious designs of any of the Sardars by the opposition of the rest. The Russian expedition to Khiva, the Punjabees would insist, was both interesting and instructive in that it showed conclusively that the 'more great (sic) are the difficulties of the Russian position in Central Asia, the more safely we may let them alone.'<sup>54</sup> The Central Asian Question, if there was any, they maintained, was not an Indian but an European Question. 'I cannot understand', Lawrence wrote, 'what impels our leading men every now and then to overlook all that we have to do in British India and try to bring us in contact with the people in distant, difficult and hostile regions. I presume, it must be the love of novelty, the desire for change, the hope of distinction...'<sup>55</sup>

The advice that Edwardes gave in 1862 in the context of the Herat war was to leave Afghanistan to contend with Persia so long as only Persia was in the field. 'It will be time for the English to move when the Russians are seen in arms...Afghans are soldiers to a man. The Ameer does not want for men, but for money. He lives from hand to mouth and has scraped a few lakhs together by a thousand measures. Give him a moderate subsidy when an enemy attacks him and he will be quite equal to keep the field. Give him more, and he may be driven out.'<sup>56</sup> Even as late as 1867, Lawrence was to insist that 'no good can come of any close relations with chiefs of Central Asia. [What] such a chief would desire would be a treaty, whereby we bind ourselves to assist him in the event of foreign danger. Such a treaty would practically be one-sided, it would bind us, not him. To be on a really friendly footing also we should assist such a chief with money and arms to a certain extent, and even then we must be treated somewhat indifferently...I see no necessity, no advantage in our adopting such a policy.'<sup>57</sup> Lawrence was, however, aware of the

54. Lawrence to Cranborne, 18 October 1866, Sal P.

55. Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 December 1866, Sal P.

56. Note by Edwardes, 29 May 1862, Sal P. Lawrence made the following marginal note in 26 October 1866: 'No foreign enemy could drive out the head of the Afghans if they were tolerably united. The country is wonderfully strong for defence.' See Lawrence to Cranborne, 26 October 1866, Sal P.

57. Lawrence to Cranborne, February 7, Sal P.

limitations of his policy. A day might come, he wrote prophetically, when it would be 'wise' to adopt an energetic policy of subsidy and treaty.<sup>58</sup> But then India might drift into an Afghan war—a prospect which the Punjabees were apt to overlook. Besides, if the question of Afghanistan became a matter of European diplomacy as the affairs of Turkey had done, Britain might find that she had more than one sick man on her hands and the new patient might prove to be very troublesome.<sup>59</sup>

Apparently, non-interference in Afghan affairs was the keynote of Punjabee tradition. There were, however, some important reservations. It would not view, for example, a Russian advance beyond the Hindu-kush with indifference.<sup>60</sup> Nor would it allow any of the Afghan chiefs to invite interested parties from without to invest in Afghan politics.<sup>61</sup> Besides, there was little hesitation in exerting the moral influence of the British name, if effective use of it was to perpetuate the political balance of a disunited Afghanistan.<sup>62</sup> In accordance with this policy the territories north of the Hindukush had been recognised as an independent territory under the leadership of the romantic Murad Beg.<sup>63</sup> British agents at Herat worked relentlessly to ensure Taj Muhammad's loyalty to the British alliance.<sup>64</sup> Kandahar, which had a long connection with India, especially in terms of commerce, readily responded to the British soundings and Kohindil Khan continued to retain British agents and advice as a mark of his independence. Dost Muhammad alone remained relatively isolated at Kabul and the British relations with him continued to be characterised by 'sullen acquiescence on either side without offences, but without goodwill or interference'.<sup>65</sup> Peshawar stood as the symbol of Anglo-Afghan tension,<sup>66</sup> and the Dost was anxious, as ever, to win it back.

58. *Ibid.*

59. B. Frere to Salisbury, November 13, 1876, Sal P.

60. Lawrence to Cranborne, 26 October 1866, Sal P.

61. Lawrence to Cranborne, 2 July 1866, Sal P.

62. Compare the policy of the Government of India during the Afghan civil war, 1863-68

63. For details, 'Summary of Information regarding events on Afghanistan' by J.W. Wyllie, 11 June 1866, M.P. 5.

64. J.P. Ferrier, 'History etc.', *op. cit.*, ch. XXVI, for British relations with Taj Muhammad.

65. Quoted in O.T. Burne, 'Memorandum on the Central Asian Question' Memorandum C. 9.

66. Lawrence to Salisbury, 5 December 1866, Sal P.

But not long after the inception of the new policy, Afghan politics showed signs of moving along a different path from that which had been anticipated. The feverish activities of the British agent at Herat made no impact on Taj Muhammad who pursued his interests with unabated zeal. Todd<sup>67</sup> had temporised with him, but the liberal grant of aid in money and arms failed to keep his ambitions in tune with British interests.<sup>68</sup> Dost Muhammad was soon to join with Herat in conquering the States to the north.<sup>69</sup> The alliance between Herat and Kabul against the Kohindil brothers of Kandahar, which had been strengthened by a marriage tie,<sup>70</sup> developed anti-British overtones,<sup>71</sup> and Ghilzai grievances against the British were championed by two successive crown princes.<sup>72</sup> For a time, the Dost seemed to succeed in keeping the vengeful party in check. Yet, at least once during the Sikh war, domestic pressure forced Dost Muhammad on to a policy of action against the British.<sup>73</sup> In fact, the emergence of the Kabul-Herat axis had weakened the structure of the balance of power in Afghanistan. It was evident that Kandahar with its tribal Durrani following could not for long withstand pressure from the north and it was far from certain whether the northern alliance would remain merely as a precarious marriage of convenience. It was small wonder that the

67. British representative at the court of Herat. See Ferrier, 'History' etc. *op. cit.*, ch. XXVI.

68. Ferrier, 'History', *op. cit.*, ch. XXVI.

69. The conquest of the Uzbeg principalities of Maimena, Andkoi, Sibargham and Siripul was initiated by Taj Muhammad only upon the death of the ambitious Governor of Meshed in 1848. See J. Talboy Wheelever, '*A Memo on Afghan Turkistan*', Calcutta 1869, ch. II.

70. Prince Akbar Khan had been married to a Herat princess and upon Akbar's death the widow was married to Akbar's brother, Haider Khan. Kohindal intrigued unsuccessfully to prevent the union. Ferrier, 'History' etc., ch. XXVI.

71. See for the politics of Afghanistan of the period, *ibid.*

72. Both Akbar and Haider commanded the loyalty of the Ghilzai and the active party of Kabul. Attempts were made to make treaty relations with Persia in 1846. In fact, in 1846, Akbar obliged his father to withdraw from his affairs and the Dost found refuge with Qizzilbashes and upon Akbar's death, Muhammad Shah Khan Ghilzai revolted in sheer frustration. See for details, *ibid.*

73. Under the leadership of Prince Haider, the Afghans joined the Sikhs against the English but were defeated at Goojerat in February 21, 1849. Cf. Besworth Smith, *op. cit.*, Vol. I. ch. X, especially p. 267.

Punjabees were on their to toes look out for a Menschikoff in the Khyber.<sup>74</sup>

Yet, despite the restless energies of Kabul and Herat, the British could not fail to see the evidence of a British lobby in Kabul, partly sincere and partly a matter of expediency. Dost Muhammad, too, seemed to be aware of its importance. The native Indian agent wrote of the ruler's pacific demeanour and his endeavours to restrain the hands of his more ambitious sons.<sup>75</sup> The opposition was determined and on more than one occasion it forced the hand of the Kabul ruler. But with the death of Prince Akbar<sup>76</sup>, the Dost seemed to have assumed full control of the situation and it was a matter for serious consideration in the higher circles of the Indian administration whether it would be judicious to allow Dost Muhammad to occupy Peshawar.<sup>77</sup> However, as Afghan politics took this new course, events with graver implications began to take shape beyond the Hindukush watershed.

The end of the Crimean war inaugurated a new phase in Russian activity in Central Asia, perhaps to counterbalance her recessions in eastern Europe and the Near East. A new generation of statesmen was in control, and the issues were revived. First Kavalersky, then Count Ignatiev were at the head of the Asian department and Prince Gortchakoff had begun as Foreign Minister. Supported by energetic spirits in the local outposts, like General K. P. Kauffman and Count Michael, who played proconsular roles both in the creation and administration of policy, the Asian table found that they had a decisive voice at the Russian Foreign Ministry.<sup>78</sup> The Asian missions of N. V. Khanykov to Khorasan,

74. Bosworth Smith, *op. cit.*, vol. I, ch. XIV, p. 449.

75. Forsyth, 'Epitome of Events in Afghanistan since Dost Mohamed Khan's death', p. 25, M.P. 5.

76. Perhaps killed. Ferrier, 'History', *op. cit.*, ch. XXVI.

77. But considering the active part the Dost had taken against the British during the Sikh war, the project could not be carried through. See Lawrence to Cranborne, 5 December 1866, Sal P.

78. The contemporary observers both in India and Persia did not overlook the shift in Russian interests. Cf. the view of the English diplomat in Persia, in E. Hertslet, 'Memorandum on Russian Encroachment in Western Turkistan, and in the direction of Asterabad', 20 January 1873. F.O. 539/9, No. 401, Enclosure to No. 27 Secret Letter from India, dated 13 June, 1854. This is quoted in full in 'Historical Summary of the Central Asian Question', by L. Mallet, 30 April 1874, C. 9. Memoranda. Also see, for private views of Dalhousie in tune with his official pronouncements of the same date, J.G.A. Baird (ed.) '*Private Letters of the Marquis of Dalhousie*', London, 1910, p. 289.

of Count Ignatiev to Khiva and Bukhara, and of Valikhanov to Kashgar, all undertaken in the years 1857-59, illustrate the change of direction. General Ignatiev, in particular, was charged to study British aggressive activities and methods of trade in the Khanates and to find means of strengthening Russian influence there.<sup>79</sup> In the mid-sixties the renewed Russian emphasis on Asian interests found more concrete manifestations.<sup>80</sup> Surely, the new thrust of Russian pressure southwards was not primarily directed against the British. Russian expansion carried with it all the justifications and legends commonly ascribed to the western concept of 'white man's burden' in the context of the nineteenth century. The daring bravado and physical courage of swashbuckling explorers like Yarmak contributed much to Russian initiatives in the East. Legal support was not wanting and jurists claimed that international rights could not be taken into account when dealing with semi-barbarous people. Bruche was the Russian counterpart of James Mill, the historian of the East India Company. The philosophers of eastern expansion were Vladimir Solovev and Prince Esper Esperevich Ukhломискii. The rigours of the Central Asian climate, the fierce opposition of the local Asiatic inhabitants gave an added meaning to the cry of 'Eastward Ho'.<sup>81</sup>

The 'white Tsar' wrote a Russian general, 'appears in the eyes of the Asiatic masses as surrounded with a halo of mystic might'.<sup>82</sup>

79. For a close study of Russian expansion since the Crimean War, the following authorities may be consulted : Eugene Schuyler, '*Turkistan Notes of a Journey in Russian Turkistan, Kokand, Bokhara, and Kulja*', vol. I, London, 1875; especially ch. XIV, p. 258-326. A. Krausse, '*Russia in Asia*', London, 1899, ch. X, XI, XII. For the Russian policy of identifying their interests with those of a collaborating commercial class, the 'Sharts' or 'Tijiks' of Central Asia, see Schuyler, *op. cit.*, vol. I, Appendix I, History of Kokand ; Col. M.J. Veniukoff, 'The Progress of Russia in Central Asia', translated by Capt. F.C.H. Clarke, C. 17.
80. In 1864, Russian authority was extended to the borders of Kokand, Bokhara and Khiva ; in 1865, Tashkent was occupied ; in 1867, the new province of Russian Turkistan was created and Bokhara became virtually a subsidiary ally of the Tsar, and in 1868, Samarkand was occupied.
81. For the legends and justifications of Russian Central Asia mission, see George Frederick Wright, '*Asiatic Russia*', New York, 1902, vol. I, pp. 135-50. Raymond H. Fisher, '*The Russian Fur Trade*', Berkeley, 1943, pp. 29-33, and Andrew Malozemoff, '*Russian Far Eastern Policy 1881-1904 with special emphasis on the Causes of the Russo-Japanese War*', Berkeley, 1958, pp. 41-50.
82. Quoted C.F. Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 143.

It was geographical proximity which gave to the Russians, in their own eyes, a special right in Central Asia; indeed, the British were called upon to show less suspicion and jealousy and more moderation towards Russian's Europeanising mission.<sup>83</sup> Besides, Russian expansion was not entirely unprovoked. The British conquest of Sind and Punjab, the extension of the subsidiary system over Kashmir, the bold Persian war over Herat and the gradual re-establishment of the cordial relationship with Dost Muhammad were bound to inspire countermoves. The desire to neutralise the effects of British ascendancy and the importance of anticipating the rival power in Central Asia were legitimate diplomatic considerations.<sup>84</sup>

The dramatic extension of the Russian frontier, however, was quite naturally viewed with anxiety from India, notwithstanding the convincing arguments of Gortchakoff's circular of 1864.<sup>85</sup> In view

83. An able observer of Russian affairs with understandable exaggeration and in a slightly humorous vein wrote in 1896: 'There is not a graduate of the Corps de Page, an officer of the Guards nor an employee of the Foreign Ministry, who is not firmly convinced that all Asia, including, of course, India, is part of Russia's birth-right, and that the policy of the Tsardom should be shaped in accordance with these great expectations', quoted in Andrew Malozemoff, *op. cit.*, p. 50.
84. Veniu Koff, 'The progress of Russia in Central Asia', c. 17, Memorandum *op. cit.*, p. 6; 'Affairs in Turkistan', compiled by Col. Belyavsky of the Russian General Staff, translated in the Intelligence Branch, War Office, by Capt. J.W. Murray, London 1886, pp. 12, 13, 24, 108, 134, GraP. Cf. also the views of the Russian Press, 'Mr. Michell's Abstracts of Remarks of Russian Press', being Appendix VI of O.T. Burne, 'Memo' C. 9; 'Moscow Gazette', July 9/21, Enclosure 1, in No. 42, F.O. 9/539.
85. In that document it was stated that the course of policy to be followed by Russia in Central Asia was not that of extending the dominion beyond reasonable limits but to establish that dominion on a firm basis, ensure its security, and develop its commerce and civilisation. In order to obtain this threefold object the following principles were laid down. First, that two fortified lines of frontier, the one extending from China to Lake Isuk Kul, the other from the sea of Aral along the Syr Daria, should be united by a chain of ports so closely connected as to offer each other mutual assistance, and render impossible all attempts at invasion on the part of the nomad tribes. Secondly, that the connected lines of ports should be situated in a fertile country suitable for colonisation and thirdly, that the position of this fortified frontier should be based on a system of geographical and political as well as natural conditions of a nature that would not render it liable to dangerous expansion and it was further  
(see next page)

of their responsibilities in India, the British found it increasingly difficult to remain content with the Russian explanation of their territorial expansion as the product of unauthorised initiatives on the part of local pro-consuls. The implication of sinister Russian designs on India loomed large in the eyes of the administrators in India and the diplomats in Teheran, as accounts, both factual and fanciful, of the proliferation of Russian camps and the march of the Cossack army trickled through the Hindukush and the Karakoram passes to tax their nervous anxiety. The philosophical detachment of Lawrence administered a considerable sedative. But the Indian officials' obsession with Central Asia survived the official palliatives and the sixties saw a constant flow of excited ideas in minutes and memoranda dwelling on the implications of a Russian menace. Some of them never reappeared from the masterly inactivity pigeon hole,<sup>86</sup> but many found their way to headquarters in London in search of more receptive ears. If Wood,<sup>87</sup> Northcote<sup>88</sup> and Stanley<sup>89</sup> remained unconvinced, there were plenty of energetic spirits in Rawlinson,<sup>90</sup> Frere<sup>91</sup> and Kaye<sup>92</sup> to keep the pot boiling.

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explained that this desirable object was to be attained by assimilating the condition of the nomad tribes to that of the Kirghese subjects until those districts were reached which were inhabited by agricultural and commercial populations. See for the text of the Circular, W.K. Fraser-Tytler, *Afghanistan*, Oxford, 1950, pp. 305-9.

86. O.T. Burne, Memorandum on 'Seistan', (undated) 1869, M.P. 5.
87. Wood, Sir Charles; first Viscount Halifax (1800-85); Liberal Statesman; Secretary for India, 1859-66; Lord Privy Seal, 1870-74.
88. Northcote, Sir Stafford Henry; first earl of Iddesleigh (1818-87); Conservative Statesman, greatly in Disraeli's confidence; Secretary for India, 1867.
89. Stanley, Edward Henry; fifteenth Earl of Derby (1826-93); Statesman; Indian Secretary, (1858-59); Foreign Secretary, (1874-78); succeeded as Earl in 1869; Foreign Secretary, (1874-78); resigned in 1878 on Eastern Question; left Conservatives, 1880; Colonial Secretary under Gladstone, 1882-85; joined Liberal Unionists and led them in the Lords, 1886-91.
90. Rawlinson, Henry Creswick (1810-95); Bombay Service, 1827; Instructor, Persian Army, 1833-9; Political Assistant, Kabul, 1839-40; Political Agent, Turkish Arabia, 1843; Consul General, Bagdad, 1854; exploring Babylonia, 1846-55; Director, East India Company; Member of India Council 1858-9 and 1868-95.
91. Frere, Henry Bartle Edward (1815-1884); entered Bombay civil service, 1834; resident at Satara, 1846; chief-commissioner of Sind, 1850-9; Governor of Bombay, 1862-7; returned to England as member of the India Council, 1867; sent to Zanzibar to negotiate suppression of Slave trade, 1872; accompanied the Prince of Wales to India, 1875; Governor of the Cape and the first High Commissioner of South Africa, 1877; recalled in 1880.
92. Kaye, Sir John William (1814-1876); entered East India Civil Service, 1855; Secretary of India Office, Political and Secret Department, from Mill's retirement till 1874.

Few in authority, both in Calcutta and London, seriously entertained the possibility of an actual Russian threat to India. Not even Rawlinson, whose reaction was the most hysterical,<sup>93</sup> dared raise the issue of a possible Cossack invasion of India.<sup>94</sup> British statesmen were willing to accept that Russian moves in Asia were guided by a legitimate desire to extend their commerce and to maintain the security of the Russian frontier.<sup>95</sup> Many excused Russian expansion in view of her peculiar geographical proximity with Asiatic 'barbarism', and 'the civilising effects of her border government on the wild tribes' were warmly welcomed.<sup>96</sup> The controversy led to the emergence of two distinct sets of opinions: these were commonly called by contemporary observers the Stationary and the Forward, perhaps for lack of more judicious nomenclature in the polemics of the day,<sup>97</sup> and subsequently adopted by historians, probably because of their definitional clarity.<sup>98</sup> But neither Green,<sup>99</sup> nor Lumsden,<sup>100</sup> nor Rawlinson, who penned the three most controversial

93. With reference to one of Rawlinson's interpretations of Russian designs Mayo wrote: 'Old Rawlinson is rather fond of cock and bull stories, but he had out-rawlinsoned Rawlinson in his present one. Tell Forsyth that I never heard a more cock and bull story in my life.' Mayo to O.T. Burne, 19 January 1871, Mayo 9vb.
94. H. Rawlinson, 'England and Russia etc.', *op. cit.*, pp. 149-50, 195, 199.
95. Clarendon to Buchanan, 20 February 1869, B.P. in Letters : 1869.
96. See also, Mayo to Bartle Frere, May 27, 1869, M.P. 30/2, No. 88; cf. Rawlinson, *op. cit.*, p. 195 when the author, an alarmist Russophobe, regarded the conquest of central Asia as a triumph of civilisation over barbarism and saw no threat to India beyond competition from an 'Asiatic Russia.....possessing within itself a germ of vitality and vigour that will enable it to replenish rather than exhaust the parent stem', quoted in J.P.T. Bury (ed.), *The New Cambridge Modern History*, Cambridge, 1960, vol. X, p. 388.
97. Hansard, 9 August, 1877, third series, CCXXXVI, col. 118.
98. Cf., for example, Dodwell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of The British Empire*, Vol. V, Cambridge, 1952, pp. 451-461. D.K. Ghose, 'England and Afghanistan', Calcutta, 1950, p. 3.
99. Henry Green, successor of General John Jacob in Sind. His views were based on that of his predecessor (*vide*, Pelly, L., 'Views and Opinions of the General John Jacob', 1858, especially pp. 375-85). and were endorsed by Sir Bartle Frere, then Governor of Bombay, P.P. 1879, Central Asia and Quetta, (73), p. 13.
100. Lieutenant Colonel P.S. Lumsden, the Deputy Quarter-Master General of the Bengal Army.

documents<sup>101</sup> on the subject, would advocate an immediate and isolated move to Quetta, although they did accept that strategically it was 'the bastion of the front attack', remarkably 'adapted for meeting all comers, as friends or foes, from the west towards the east'.<sup>102</sup> Quetta, to them, was the focal point of a general improvement of British relations with the Khan of Khelat and the Amir of Kabul, and an integral part of a plan to convert these states into strong, independent, friendly, and, if necessary, subsidised outposts of the British Empire.<sup>103</sup> Even Lawrence, the central figure of the 'stationary' school would not have viewed the prospect of Russian influence at Kabul with indifference,<sup>104</sup> satisfied though he was with the Sikh line of the tran-Indus foothills.<sup>105</sup> And on this score one of the leading Liberals of the day made no bones about the suicidal strategy of the Peshawar frontier.<sup>106</sup> In fact, the

101. These are suggestions for the protection of N.W. Frontier of India, H. Green, 16 August 1866, P.P. 1879, Central Asia and Quetta (73) pp. 2-6; Lumsden, 'Memorandum', 15 September 1867, *ibid.*, pp. 10-12; Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on Central Asia', 20 July 1868, P.P. LVI, C. 2190 pp. 31-40; also in Rawlinson 'England and Russia' etc. *op. cit.*, pp. 263-292.
102. 'Jacob's note' on Central Asia, 1856. P.P. 1879, Central Asia and Quetta, (73) pp. 6-9.
103. 'With Afghanistan independent', wrote Lumsden, 'and her capital secured and connected with our lines of communication our right is safe, and an aggressive power could only attack our left'—an attack which Lumsden believed, could not be undertaken, 'except during the cold season' and which, 'with our communications perfected and our base on sea' could easily be repulsed. (*ibid.*, p. 10). Lumsden, 'Memo', 15 September, 1867, P.P. 1879, (73) p. 10.
104. For the views of Lawrence, who vetoed the recommendation of Lumsden, Green and Rawlinson alike, see 'Minute', by Lawrence, October, 1867 together with 'Minute', 5 October, 1867, by Col. Henry Norman and 'Minute' by William Mansfield, 14 October, 1867 as well as the 'Minutes' of the Viceroy, Brigadier General H.B. Lumsden, D.F. Macleod, the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab and Reynell Taylor, the Commissioner of Ambala on the Memorandum of Rawlinson, P.P. LVI C. 2190, pp. 45-46.
105. The Punjabees had almost a universal faith in the Sikh line of frontier; cf. the views of Sir William Mansfield (afterwards Lord Sandhurst), Sir Henry Durand, Sir Henry Norman and others on the question in P.P. 1879, Central Asia and Quetta, (73), pp. 20-21, and P.P. 1878, Afghanistan No. I, (I. 907), pp. 56-81.
106. C.W. Dilke, "Greater Britain", London, 1868, Vol. I, p. 302. Lawrence himself was aware of the shortcomings of the existing frontier. In 1857, (see next page)

difference between the two sets of opinion lay more in priorities of interest, tempered, of course, by the tragedies of personal experience, as was the case with Lawrence,<sup>107</sup> or by the personal ambitions of a few distinguished officials which both Argyll and Lawrence were so eager to detect.<sup>108</sup> Yet, while the problem was being thrashed out in official debate, men in charge of policy-making came to appreciate, albeit reservedly, the realities underlying the inflated Russophobia.

The Russian expansion did certainly pose a problem of some magnitude. The defence of British India in the 19th century could not solely depend on British supremacy at sea. True, an attack through Baluchistan with the connivance of Persia could have been checked by a diversionary move by sea on the Persian Gulf.<sup>109</sup> But

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he insisted, although unsuccessfully, on the withdrawal from Peshawar in search of a more reliable frontier at the Indus. Bosworth Smith, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, ch. iv, pp. 134-65. In 1866, he showed great concern at the orders of the Home Government to stop the work on the fortified cantonments of Peshawar. He was, in particular, of opinion that 'this was not a politic measure.' 'We require', he added, 'a fortification of some kind there. We cannot hold Peshawar Valley safely and firmly without English troops and a Railway to Peshawar from Lahore will not be a satisfactory substitute for the presence of such troops.' Lawrence to Cranborne, 5 December, 1866, SalP, also same to same, 19 December, 1866, SalP. About the same time, Lawrence, dwelling on the question of Quetta, made no bones about the 'advantages to be gained by occupying Quetta.' His argument against pushing the frontier forward was based on not-too-convincing grounds of political realism. 'At present', he wrote, 'we have beyond the Scinde border 30 miles of desert, the plain of Cutchee and 75 miles of the Bolan Pass (sic) before we reach any formidable tribes. We are able to hold our Border with a comparatively small force, because the chief tribes beyond it are subsidised and those tribes are universally small, and can be easily kept in check by Scinde forces. But it becomes a very different matter when we push beyond our subsidised tribes and find ourselves face to face with a more warlike people, far more numerous and without those natural barriers of mountains and deserts that we have.' Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 September, 1866, SalP. It is evident, however, that Lawrence did not have any firm conviction of the impregnability of natural barriers in so far as the defence of Peshawar was concerned.

107. It was generally believed that Lawrence's policy was much conditioned by the disaster of 1842.

108. Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 December, 1866, SalP. Also Argyll to Mayo, 4 April 1869, No. 22, M.P. 34.

109. As had been the case in 1857.

Herat could still be reached without any active support from Persia for the route to Merv could be traced along territory untouched by the sovereignty of Khiva or Persia. In fact, the question of the defence of India became all the more important as the Russians moved nearer Merv.<sup>110</sup> Such a fear became perceptible immediately after the Crimean War.<sup>111</sup> These apprehensions were apt to be exaggerated, especially when the militarists virtually held both military and political responsibility for the frontier region.<sup>112</sup> On the other hand, the statesmen of an island power such as Britain were slow to appreciate the implications of the military defence of a continental power such as British India. The imperial objectives of Russia were admirably couched in the diplomatic language of Gortchakoff's Circular. In that document the frontier which was described as being least liable to dangerous extension was a river, and that 'river' was evidently the Syr Daria, along whose banks could have been found the agricultural and commercial population referred to, while the nomad tribes, who were destined to be assimilated to the condition of the Russian Kirghiz, were scattered throughout the Khanate of Kokand. In analysing the implications of such a scheme of things, Lumley, the Central Asian expert of the Foreign Office, concluded that, 'should Russia continue her progress up the Syr Daria as far as it is navigable, fortifying its banks as she advanced, she might point to this official declaration of her intention in defence

110. On the strategic importance of Merv, especially for offensive purposes against both Meshad and Herat, see a good discussion in Col. C.M. McGregor, '*Journey through Khorasan*', vol. II, London, 1888, Appendix X, 'Merve Question', especially pp. 244-46.

111. Cf., the views of Mr. Abbot, Her Majesty's Consul-General at Tabreez, 2 August 1856, and of Mr. Alison, the British Minister at Teheran, 1865, quoted in No. 402, 'Memorandum on Russian Encroachments in western Turkistan, and in the direction of Asterabad (Ashoorada)' by E. Hertslet, January 21, 1873. F.O. 539/9.

112. In India, the inter-dependence of soldier and civilian in the formation of policy was plainly visible. It was more so in the administration of the frontier region and in chalking out a foreign policy. Both the C. in C. and the Military Member of the Viceroy's council played an important part in policy-making and many of the Government's most important political advisers were soldiers. In particular, Mansfield, who succeeded to the Office of C. in C. in 1864, had a very strong opinion in favour of making the C. in C. a Minister of war and even recorded a minute to the effect. His views were favourably welcomed both by the Indian and Home authorities. Wood to Lawrence, 25 November 1864, LawP., 25 No. 63. Also see G.J. Alder, '*British India's Northern Frontier*', London, 1963, P.4.

of her proceedings and the programme, thus laid down, indicated nothing less than the intention to annex the Khanate of Kokand to the Russian Empire.<sup>113</sup> The concept of definite territorial jurisdiction had been unknown in Central Asia and traditional rights and obligations cut across political frontiers.<sup>114</sup> It was feasible, therefore, that Russia, once in possession of Kokand, would not lose sight of the value of rights hitherto exercised by the Khan in Eastern Kashgar and in the petty principalities of Shignan, Darwaz and Kunduz. Thus, while retaining the principles of a 'river frontier', it was evident that Russia might adopt the Oxus as the limit of her dominion in Central Asia—a probability which called for 'a certain amount of prudent supervision on our part.'<sup>115</sup>

The routes leading to India from the points which the Russians had reached may be divided into three groups: those running from Tashkent or Fort Tokmak through Kashgar and Yarkand to Kashmir; those leading from Samarkand and Bukhara through the Chitral or Bamian Passes to Afghanistan and thence through the Khyber Pass to the Indus; and those which, after converging on Herat, passed by way of Kandahar and Bolan to the Indus.<sup>116</sup> In examining the comparative importance of these routes, the War Office concluded that 'the Russians in any invasion of our dominions whether from the side of Chinese territory or Afghanistan, would have most formidable obstacles to encounter.'<sup>117</sup> The distance from Samarkand to India via the Bamian was about 900 miles, the number of men to be transported would certainly not be less than 30,000 and when and if they ever reached India, they would find a highly disciplined force under a British leader with good railway communications and fertile country in the rear.<sup>118</sup> As regards the first set of routes, it was clear that until Kokand was subjugated the only route along which a Russian attack on Kashgar could be made would be round the Western end of Lake Isuk Kul through extremely

113. 'Note on Central Asia', J.S. Lumley, written for the use of Foreign (Central Asia IIc.) Office, M.P. 6, 15 June 1867.

114. *Ibid.*

115. Lumley to Stanley, 15 June, 1867. M.P. 6, Central Asia, IIc.

116. 'Russian Advances in Asia', War Office, 1873. Appendix II, in O.T. Burne, 'Historical Summary of the Central Asian Question', *op. cit.*, p. 64.

117. *Ibid.*, p. 67.

118. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

difficult and precipitous mountain country.<sup>119</sup> In any operation through Kashgar country to Kashmir, wheeled traffic was out of the question. If an enemy were ever hardy enough to attempt the passage of these mountains, a very small force would suffice to halt his progress.<sup>120</sup> Most of the routes from the western flank passed through Persian territory, which was nowhere entirely barren and was inhabited by a sedentary population. Of these routes the one from Asterabad via Khabushan, Meshed and Herat to Kandahar was perhaps the easiest and most direct. But then, Persia could not be expected to co-operate actively in a Russian project on India and the vulnerability of Persia from the south was a safe guarantee that this would not happen. Further north, however, there were two routes from Turkistan and Chikishlar to Herat which did not traverse Persian territory. But here, Turkoman resistance could still be relied upon as an effective deterrent to any Russian action.<sup>121</sup>

Nevertheless, it was difficult to be objective and rational about matters of self-defence. The establishment of a foreign military power beyond the sphere of British influence was unacceptable in terms of power.<sup>122</sup> The impact that Russian success might make on the psychology of the native population and the prospect of new alignments hostile to British interests were apprehensions of a more real and substantial nature than can be appreciated by modern British historians, now that the concept of imperial obligation is a thing of the past. But no politician of the day would overlook the fact that one

119. R.B. Shaw, 'Memo on the Russian Military operation against Eastern Turkistan', 8 October 1869. M.P. 6.

120. Such was the view adopted by War Office in 1873, (*vide* 'Russian Advances in Asia', *op. cit.*, p. 65) despite the fact that in some recent speeches, Shaw had given a more favourable account of these routes and had stated that he believed them to be practicable for the passage of guns. Similar views were expressed by Forsyth in his report on Eastern Turkistan. See T.D. Forsyth (ed.), '*Report of a Mission to Yarkand in 1873*', Calcutta 1875, p. 8; also, H. Trotter, 'On the geographical results of the Mission to Kashgar under T.D. Forsyth, 1873-74', *J.R.G.S.*, vol. XLVIII, 1878, p. 173. The War Office, however, noted that 'the difficulty would however still remain of an army operating through an extremely difficult country at a long distance from its base.' 'Russian Advance in Asia', War Office, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

121. *Ibid.*, p. 66, J.T. Wheeler, 'Russian Expedition against Balkan Bay', 17 December 1869, M.P. 6.

122. See, for an interesting study of 'Power' as a distinct feature of Imperial history, A.P. Thornton, '*Doctrine of Imperialism*', New York, 1965, ch. 2.

of the chief aims of Russian policy in Central Asia was to obtain a position from which Britain's possession, India, could be threatened.<sup>123</sup> It was believed not only in Britain, but also by many in India, that the great uprising of 1857 owed its origin, in part, to the activities of Russian agents, some of whom were known to have visited the Indian provinces.<sup>124</sup> Russian agents were still believed to be active in the native courts. Baroda and Holkar talked of the Russian presence as an effective deterrent to British activities in India. The Russians were suspected, rightly or wrongly, of inspiring internal disaffections.<sup>125</sup> Proclamations were published in favour of the Tsar from the very centre of British power in India,<sup>126</sup> while there was serious apprehension that the native forces of the new professional middle class might make use of the Russian menace to serve their own interests.<sup>127</sup> In short, the administrators were apprehensive that Russian-inspired schemes might harm the stability of the Empire.

Still, these were indirect dangers which might largely have been remedied by an effective consolidation of British power within the confines of India.<sup>128</sup> Surely such distant dangers at a time when the Russians were still busy encountering the ferocious resistance of Khiva and the Turkoman tribes<sup>129</sup> should not have alarmed British statesmen to the extent that they in fact did. The following quotation is illustrative of a typical British reaction : 'We are straining every nerve of our policy to prevent any event taking place which would

123. 'To be able at the opportune moment to influence the general policy of England'; 'to menace the England possessions in India and to be dangerous to our enemy'; 'to threaten the East Indian possessions of England'; 'to strike a blow at her East Indian possessions'—these were the avowed aims of the successive steps of Russian progress in Turkistan and Transcaspian. See 'Affairs in Turkistan' by Col. Belyavsky of the Russian General Staff, translated in the Intelligence Branch, War Office, by Capt. J.W. Murray. London, 1836, pp. 12, 14, 24, 103, 134. GranP.

124. Lumley to Lord Stanley, 15 June, 1867. M.P. 6.

125. Col. H.D. Dally (Agent for Central India) to W. Seaton-Karr, 23 March 1869; also same to same, 12 April 1869. M.P. 6, Central Asia II h.

126. Papers connected with Russian proclamations circulated in India, M.P. 6, Central Asia II b. Also, copy of a few proclamations in Appendix V. Burne, 'Historical Summary etc.' *op. cit.*

127. Cranborne to Lawrence, 2 October 1866, SalP. Letter Book 5, p. 34.

128. Of course, there was some disposition to over-emphasise such a policy of internal reforms, as a means to self-defence. Cf. Lawrence to Cranborne, 4 December, 1866, SalP.

129. On the Turkoman tribes, see F. Goldsmid, 'Capt. Napier's Journey on the Turkoman Frontier of Persia', P.R.G.S., 1875-6, vol. XX.

oblige us to send a single horseman over any part of the frontier of Hindustan.... Therefore any advance on our part is out of the question—but we are determined as long as the sun shines in heaven to hold India—our National character—our commerce demands it—and we have in one way or another two hundred and fifty millions of English capital in this country. We have never to my knowledge done anything (certainly of the late years) to thwart Russian progress in India. Perhaps for that reason she may think us careless, even timid, but it has often occurred to me that the Emperor and his Government are ignorant of the mighty power we wield in India and of the moral influence we could if we choose, exercise on our borders.... If any combination of misfortunes rendered it necessary there would not be the smallest military difficulty in putting 5,000 disciplined British troops, half of them Europeans, and 100 guns and as many more Afghans on the Oxus in three months.... Now this is not swagger—it is sober truth.<sup>130</sup> Such swashbuckling bravado was not a Lyttonian fantasy. The author was an intensely practical Irishman then in charge of the Indian administration. The date was not 1879 but 1869. Bukhara, Khiva, Kokand and the Turkomans were still independent. The genesis of such sentiments must be sought in more real interests than the demands of military strategy.

A protectionist commercial policy was the principal accessory of Russia's Asian drive. With an overwhelming geographical advantage in her favour, a desire to control the Asian market was only natural. Her trade with Central Asia was one of long standing. From the days of the Romans, the fabulous products of the Orient had been transported along the old 'silk routes' of Central Asia.<sup>131</sup> Medieval Russia's contacts with Asia were primarily the work of the city of Novgorod. They were led not by an absolute monarch and his obedient underlings, but by a fickle, half-theocratic democracy, whose chief activity was commerce.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, the Empire of Novgorod was above all a commercial dominion; the discoveries and conquests of her pioneers were the victories of a remarkable commercial

130. Mayo to Andrew Buchanan, September 20, 1869. B.P. In Letters, 1869.

131. L.F. Kostenko, 'The Turkish Region', Simla 1882, vol. I, p. 59.

132. C. Raymond Beazley, 'The Russian Expansion Towards Asia and the Arctic in the Middle Ages (to 1500)', *The American Historical Review* XII, 1903, pp. 731-41.

expansion.<sup>133</sup> These commercial relations had taken root so deeply, and Moscow had to so great a degree adapted herself to her distant neighbours that Russian merchandise commanded a lower price on the Bukharan market than in Moscow itself.<sup>134</sup> The fresh impulse in Russian expansion since the Crimean War saw a growing and concerted interest in trade with the East.<sup>135</sup> Concessions were obtained from the Asian courts.<sup>136</sup> Agents of Russian commercial houses, surveyors and explorers, both official and private, were sent along the course of the Syr Daria to the valley of Tarakhan and through the desert of Kizil Kum in order to gauge its potentialities as well as to report on topographical details so as to facilitate the development of new routes.<sup>137</sup> M. Glukovsky, who furnished perhaps the most exhaustive paper on the subject and with whose views most of the Russian writers of the day seemed to agree, emphasised how the mastery of these markets must be based on a 'foundation of firm ground', as opposed to a superiority depending

133. In the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Russian traders exchanged merchandise with the Chinese at Kiakhta on the Russo-Mongolian border. Then trade shifted to the Turkistan routes because Russian caravans could go directly to markets in Southern China, the roads were better, and Russian railway and ship lines were established in Russian Turkistan. See for details, R. Michell, 'Report on the Overland Trade between Russia and China : its Decline and future prospects', pp.1-5, 48-50. This memorandum, prepared in the India Office, Political and Secret Department, in 1877, is a concise survey of Asiatic landborne trade based largely on Russian sources.

134. T.D. Forsyth, 'A Memorandum on Trade with Central Asia', Calcutta, 1870, M.P. 6, P. 4. Schuyler, *op. cit.*, II, p. 95-97; 'Report of Nazir Ibrahim Khan's account of his visit to Bokhara', (1869-70), pp.15-16, M.P. 5.

135. In Foreign Office/65, there are numerous translations of articles appearing in Russian newspapers and magazines which were forwarded to the Foreign Office from St. Petersburg or were prepared in the India Office. Some deal with the problem of Russian foreign trade and with the peculiar advantages of the Oriental market. See for example, an article quoted in R. Michell, 'Memorandum on Eastern Turkistan', March 25, 1870, F.O. 65/872.

136. In 1851, the Russians obtained important trade privileges on the Sino-Russian border, and the right to establish factories and a Consulate at Kuldja, north of the Tian Shan. The construction of Port Vernoe a few years later paved the way for the rapid penetration of Trans-Ili district. E. Hertslet, '*Treaties, etc. between Great Britain and China and between China and Foreign powers*', vol. I, *op. cit.*, pp. 449-54.

137. For Russian explorations during the period, see L.F. Kostenko, Vol. I, *op. cit.*, p. 39.

on sea power.<sup>138</sup> Providence, it was argued, having placed Russia to the north and west of Asia, had thereby given her all the required means for spreading her superior influence in terms of commerce and politics. Of all Russian manufacturing industries, the cotton spinning and weaving industry seemed to depend most heavily on Central Asia for its raw materials.<sup>139</sup> It was estimated that per capita cotton consumption in Russia was capable under favourable circumstances of being raised to the British rate of consumption.<sup>140</sup> The cotton industry was expected to get a further impetus as the emancipation of the serfs was bound to bring 'little comforts' to the peasant's cottage.<sup>141</sup> The new emphasis on the structure of consumption had begun to be reflected in the pattern of trade at the fair of Nijni Novgorod.<sup>142</sup> In 1858, export duty on Russian goods entering Bukhara, and the embargo on cotton imported from Bukhara, had been removed. In the following year, cotton was allowed from Bukhara duty free. The effect of these measures was that the greater part of Central Asian cotton imported into Russia was declared to be the produce of Bukhara, while all Russian exports to Central Asia were declared for Bukhara.<sup>143</sup> Apart from this staple import, there was great clamour in commercial circles for the development of the tea trade. Prior to the disturbances in the western provinces of China all the Central Asian territories obtained their supplies of tea by this route and partly from Eastern Turkistan, whence by way of

138. T.D. Forsyth, 'A Memoranda on trade etc.', *op. cit.*, dwells on Glukovsky's views in some detail.

139. It was estimated that by 1850, in about 27 years of its life, the cotton industry of Russia had quadrupled its production, thanks to the patronage of Russian Ministry of Finance. In 1864, 1,371,196 poods (one pood being equal to 36 lbs.) of cotton yarn were employed in the manufacture of cotton goods in Russia, 'Report by Lumley, Her Majesty's secy. of Embassy on the trade and manufacture of cotton in Russia', P.P. LIV, p. 539.

140. *Ibid.*, p. 457.

141. Lumley wrote 'there can be no doubt that of all manufactures that which is likely to be most affected by the improved condition of the Russian emancipated peasant is the cotton industry.' *Ibid.*, p. 457.

142. Importation of raw cotton from Bukhara, which in 1853 amounted to 39,451 poods, value 171,015 silver roubles, rose in 1855 to 105,849 poods, value 468,213, and continued to increase till in 1860 it reached 168,070 poods and in 1864 it was reported to be 750,000, about one fourth of the annual consumption of raw cotton by Russia. *Ibid.*

143. *Ibid.*, p. 459. Also see the Paper by G. Kuhlewein, Secy. to Gen. Ignatiev's mission to Khiva in 1858, 7/19 February 1862. Quoted in *ibid.*

one in which the Russians were to remain free from having to cope with foreign competition. British merchandise passing through the Hindukush, especially tea and indigo from India, was becoming a formidable rival. In 1868, such quantities of tea and cotton goods were brought to Bukhara from India that the Russian tea trade was suspended and the sale of Russian manufactures fell off considerably.<sup>147</sup> Despite the rigid tariff and commercial policy of Bukhara, her trade with Russia showed a steady decline.<sup>148</sup> In fact, there was a serious threat that Persian and Central Asian markets might be flooded with British manufactured goods passing through the Hindukush and the Caucasus, thus dealing a heavy blow to Russian trade and industry. Such forebodings were aggravated by the fact that these Khanates were not able to fulfil even 'the most just of their international obligations.' Indeed, the Hindukush and the various tribes and petty Khans at the source of the Amu Daria (hitherto looked upon by Russian diplomats as providing sufficient safeguard for their commercial interests) were being brought under the authority of Kabul.<sup>149</sup> To avert the imminent catastrophe two definite courses of action were advanced. First, it was necessary that Russia should strive to decrease the cost of carriage and this could only be done by the establishment of good

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- (b) The trade of Persia represented a sum of Rs. 40,000,000. In 1866, Russia participated in the trade to the amount of only Rs. 5,221,161 and her exports to Persia were only Rs. 1,749,067. But the most remarkable fact was that while England in 1864 exported to Persia cotton goods alone valuing Rs. 9,900,000, Russia disposed of only Rs. 168,541 worth to that country and she herself imported from them cotton goods to the value of Rs. 1,439,101. Statistics in Forsyth, 'Memo on trade etc.', *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3.

147. Forsyth, 'Memo on Trade etc.', *op. cit.*, pp. 3-7.

148. Abstract of the Report of Colonel Glukovsky to the Head of the Staff, dated 14 June 1874 (sent home in Lord A. Loftus, No. 105 of 31 March 1875) F.O. Confidential Print (2606) P. 4. Also Schuyler, *op. cit.*, vol. II, pp. 96-97.

149. 'Resume of a paper read by M. Glukovsky etc.', *op. cit.* Enclosure 3 in No. 33 FO.9/539. Besides the Hindukush, the Russians were equally concerned about the other routes available for European commercial penetration—the one, from Trebizond, through Asiatic Turkey, Persia and the Turkoman Steppe and Charjoi to Bukhara, and the other, recently opened by Russia across the Caucasus from Poti through Tiflis, Baku, Astrabad, the Turkoman Steppe and Charjoi to Bukhara. See for details, Forsyth, 'Trade with central Asia. etc.', *op. cit.*, M.P. 5.

routes of communication. In this connection, the development of a large commercial flotilla on the river Syr Daria had proved by the mid-sixties to be impossible owing to the natural features of the river. Besides, the Khanate of Bukhara stood in no need of the Syr Daria basin for its commercial intercourse with Russia. The Amu Daria, on the other hand, offered more favourable possibilities. On the Amu were situated the Khanates of Khiva, Bukhara and Turkomania. Beyond the basin of the river were Afghanistan and India, which could be attracted by this route into commercial relations with Russia. Further to the east, Chinese Turkistan could carry on trade through Vernoë and the Amur Basin through Badakshan. Although the river flowed into the desolate Sea of Aral, it was thought that since its fertile delta was only 600 versts distant from the Caspian, efforts might be made to divert it to its old bed. Such were the calculations of Russian policy throughout the period of the present study.<sup>150</sup>

According to the current Russian political economy, the second course of action lay in adopting a protectionist policy and in throwing every obstacle in the way of the import of merchandise from India. After the conquest of Tashkent in 1564 Niavab Chanioff warned the Hindu merchants that it had been decided to prohibit trade between India and Russian territory as well as the import of Russian goods. Upon the fall of Kojand, Marah Romanovski expressed a similar resolution on the part of his government. In September 1868 Russian officers issued an order prohibiting the importation of tea of any description as well as bleached and unbleached long cloth from India through Samarkand to Kojand, Kokand and Tashkent. By the official decrees of December 1868 and May 1869 importation of teas and British Indian goods from Bukhara to the Russian territory was totally prohibited.<sup>151</sup> Stremououkoff confided to Buchanan that as Russia

150. See 'Resume of a Paper by M. Glukovsky', *op. cit.*, Enclosure 3 in No. 33 FO.9/539 ; 'Abstract of a Report of Col. Glukovsky', *op. cit.*, F.O. Confidential Prints, 2606 ; 'The ancient Course of the Amu Daria', translated from a German Pamphlet by Prof. R. Lenz of the St. Petersburg 'Academie Imperiale des Sciences', Memorandum. C. 8 ; Also E. Delmar Morgan, 'The old channels of Lower Oxus—From Russian and other sources', *J.R.G.S.*, vol. XLVIII, 1878.

151. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, (Memo on trade etc.) pp. 3,11. 'Report of Nazir Ibrahim Khan's account of his visit to Bokhara', (1869-70) M.P. 8 vb. ; Translated Communication from F.B. 'Karsi', 8 November 1869—M.P. 6 IIe.

hoped to be able to procure cotton and silk in Central Asia in exchange for her manufactures, she could not be expected to encourage other countries to bring rival goods into the market.<sup>152</sup> In the 1860s government patronage of commercial interests was not wanting.<sup>153</sup> It was argued that Britain, having nothing to fear, might advocate the insidious principles of free trade which would be detrimental to the native industries. Hence the protective tariffs were upheld as a means of escape from dependence on Britain. The administration of Turkistan was empowered to conduct foreign diplomatic relations to give security to trade and to identify the interests of the trading classes with wider political considerations.<sup>154</sup> It is small wonder that Gortchakoff was to consider the question of tariff as only of secondary importance to political understanding and, if possible, he would not allow it to enter into diplomacy.<sup>155</sup>

Such a trend of events could not have been viewed with indifference in India. Of course, the uprising of 1857 had dispelled the high confidence of the rulers. Some old dreams were dead; others had been shelved. One such was that the caravan routes of Central Asia might become a highway to British trade. The missions of Burnes had been prompted largely by similar considerations.<sup>156</sup> The first Afghan war was looked upon by Lord Ellenborough as having offered new opportunities to Indian commerce.<sup>157</sup> It was, however, now thirty years since Alexander Burnes had surveyed the Indus under the pretence of bearing a present to Ranjit Singh.<sup>158</sup> During the intervening period, British initiatives, both in the Punjab and in Sind, had worked with 'utilitarian efficiency' and 'evangelical certainty' to carry out a policy of social engineering. Such efforts had their rewards. The annual reports of the Government of the Punjab leave no doubt as to the success of the administration in creating a commercial and economic unit in that province. Much of the development of the Punjab was conducted with a view to facilitating commerce between the plains of

152. Buchanan to Clarendon, 8 August, 1869, B.P. Out Letters : 1869.

153. Bury (ed.), 'New Cambridge', vol. X, *op. cit.*, pp. 364-5.

154. Forsyth, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

155. Forsyth to Burne, 7 August 1869, M. P. 9 VIIa.

156. In fact, in those days, all commercial enterprises on the Indus were inseparably connected with political events. See Huttonback, *op. cit.*, ch. II and ch. III.

157. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

158. Huttonback, *op. cit.*, ch. II and III.

India and the trans-Himalayan countries. Another feature of the progress of the Punjab was the close attention paid by the government to 'opening up a wide field of European enterprise and capital.'<sup>159</sup> As early as 1861 it was observed that with the increase of transport facilities, a line of waterways extending from Jhelum to the sea, and the proximity of friendly territory beyond the border, 'our manufacturers mighty be remuneratively introduced into the market to which Russian products were sent under much greater disadvantage.'<sup>160</sup> It was hoped that as the construction of the Sind and Punjab Railway progressed the development of trade with the countries of Central Asia would force itself on the attention of the government.<sup>161</sup> Attempts were made to bring Kashmir within the Punjab commercial unit<sup>162</sup> so as to foster trade with Central Asia. Also, the revision of tariffs in favour of British piece goods and Punjabi sugar in 1863 by the Kashmir Durbar upon the initiative of R. Montgomery was appreciated with satisfaction.<sup>163</sup> In fact, in the years between 1861 and 1866, there was considerable official activity to promote trans-frontier trade. Navigation on the Indus was improved and extended and internal land communications were developed. The abolition of custom duties and capitation tax rendered trade between Kabul and the frontiers altogether free. Representations were made to the rulers of Afghanistan to assist in maintaining law and order along the trade routes. The construction of a pontoon bridge over the Kabul river at Nowshera facilitated salt traffic. Sarais were established at Dera Ismail Khan and Dera Ghazi Khan to encourage trade through the Ghawailra Pass.<sup>164</sup> As a result, trade, which had languished

159. See for example, *Punjab Administration Report, 1867-68*. Addenda A—'Progress made in Tea plantation in the Kangra Valley' and Addenda B—'Report on Palampore Fair, 6 May 1867'.

160. *Punjab Administration Report, 1860-61*, para 172.

161. *Ibid*, para 169.

162. Davies to Northbrook, N.P/15, pp. 254-55 (1); Same to same, 19 May 1873, N.P/14, p. 201; same to same, 24 May 1873, N.P/14, pp. 189-90.

163. *Punjab Administration Report, 1863-4*. On the whole negotiation with Kashmir, see P.P. 1868-69, XLVI, 384, pp. 11-13; Lytton to Salisbury, 8 November 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 593.

164. See for details, *Punjab Administration Report, 1861-69*, especially of the years 1867-68. Appendix XVIII : 'Mr. Davies' Report on Trade of Central Asia', P.P. XLII, 1864; also 'Memorandum' by T.H. Thornton, Secy. to the Punjab Govt. Enclosure in 12a P.P. XLII, 1864..

during the period of Sikh rule, was restored and increased.<sup>165</sup> When the question of trans-frontier trade had first been mooted, Punjab was still a foreign country, and the only routes open to Afghanistan and Turkistan were the river Indus and those routes which passed through Derajat, and hence Burnes, Lord and others referred to them alone.<sup>166</sup> By the sixties, the Peshawar and Kurram Passes offered even brighter prospects. Owing to the nature of the Derajat trade, it was suggested that this trade was not capable of much expansion.<sup>167</sup> But the Shikarpur trade passing through the Bolan Pass held considerable promise.<sup>168</sup> It was expected that the development of

165. For relation of the frontier tribes with the Sikhs and its repercussions on frontier trade, see *ibid.* In 1862, the trans-frontier trade of the Punjab was valued at Rs. 277,156 for the year. By 1866, the trade between Kabul and Peshawar alone for the months of June, July, August and September was valued at Rupees 19,00,000. Tolls on all the ferries on the Indus increased from Rupees 4,002 in 1857 to Rupees 19,442 in 1859-60, and Rupees 24,736 in 1866-67. Tonnage on the upper Indus increased from 818 boats with cargoes aggregating 2,65,000 maunds in 1855 to 3,152 boats with cargoes aggregating 1,190,129 maunds valued at Rupees 66,20,838 in 1865-66. *Ibid.*
166. A. Burnes, '*Caboul*', London, 1842, Appendix I; report of the Establishment of an Entrepot or Fair, for the Indus trade pp. 283-303. Also 'Mr. Davies, Report on Trade of Central Asia', *op.cit.*, Appendix XVIII.
167. The 'Derajat' trade was carried on by the Lohanee tribes of Afghans about Ghazni and Khorasan. In November, they came down to Derajat, where they pitched their camps and leaving their family they proceeded to India. Upon their return, they would migrate to their summer pastures in April. They combined the occupations of the traders and carriers, their camels being their own property. (See details in Davies' Report, *op. cit.*, P.P. XCVIII, p. 20. Also, 'Moral and Material Progress of India', 1872-73, p. 113. P.P. vol. XLVI 1784). The Commission and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, suggested in September 1861 in his report that since time was no factor for them and that the extra marches no addition to their expenses, it appeared that the trade was not capable of expansion. See Appendix XVII, Davies' Report, *op. cit.* Davies, himself, was more optimistic and noted that the expansion of the Peshawar trade of late had excited the jealousy of the Povindahs of Derajat and favourable results were anticipated. Davies' Report, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
168. The Shikarpur trade passing through the Bolan Pass to Kandahar and Herat and thence to Khorasan was one of long standing. The Indian trade along this route was principally negotiated by Hindu merchants from Shikarpur and elsewhere; but the commerce between Kandahar, Herat and Meshed was carried on by Persians and Tajiks and even by some Persianised Durrani who brought down silkworms, turquoises, horses,

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Karachi as a commercial port would surely intensify the flow of trade through the Bolan Pass and augment the total volume of trade.<sup>169</sup> Davies, for one, found that Burnes' anticipated return of raw wool from the countries about Kandahar had been completely fulfilled.<sup>170</sup> The Punjabee officials were too keen to defend the Peshawar route as opposed to the Lohanee trade of Derajat.<sup>171</sup> The following quotation from the official report is perhaps the most characteristic of Punjabee optimism: "...we possess in the Peshawar route all the elements of an increasing traffic. We are nearer the markets we wish to supply, large trading communities are met with all along the route, containing the capitalists and traders whose dealing we wish to facilitate, and the circumstances of the traffic render a decrease of distance all important."<sup>172</sup> In the context of a search for a potential market in Central Asia, Afghanistan, with its favourable geographical position, offered a problem which was more important and more pressing than one of military defence. It connected India with Meshed and Persia, through the Bolan pass and Kandahar. To the north, Bukhara, Khiva and the Russian world could be opened up through the Khyber pass while the shortest route to Eastern Turkistan lay through Chitral and Badakshan.<sup>173</sup> The

carpets, etc. and took wool, skins and woollen fabrics in return. See for details, Davies' Report, *op. cit.*, especially XII for items of trade. Also see A. Burnes, '*Caboul*', London, 1842, ch. II for a general description of the Shikarpur trade. One must be careful as Burnes' primary concern was Indus trade and the development of the Derajat Passes. And yet, Burnes could not ignore the potentialities of the Bolan trade. 'It is only necessary', he wrote, 'to name the towns at which the Shikarpur merchants have agents to judge of their widely extended influence. Beginning from the west, every place of note from Astracan to Calcutta seems to have a Shikarporee stationed in it.' (p. 58)

169. Davies, 'Report', *op. cit.*, p. 19.

170: *Ibid.*, p. 20.

171. The Peshawar trade was carried on in the usual manner by resident firms of Amritsar, Lahore, Peshawar, Kabul and Bukhara by the well known trading tribes of Parachas of Afghanistan, Tajiks and Shinwanis, a Khyber tribe. It was expected that this trade was capable of 'any degree of expansion and a fair conveniently established would tend to facilitate the exchange.' Davies, *ibid.*, p. 20.

172. Commissioner and Superintendent, Peshawar Division, to The Secy., Govt. for the Punjab, No. 77, 12 September 1861, being Appendix XVII to Davies' Report, *op. cit.*, p. xcix.

173. Davies' Report, 'introduction', *op. cit.*

potentialities of the Oxus excited the imagination of the Indian officials. It was not merely a question of local consumption. They argued that it embraced a great continental transit trade which penetrated from the shores of India, Persia and Asiatic Turkey, through Afghanistan, Balkh, Bukhara, Samarkand, Kokand, Kashgar and Yarkand, into Mongolia, Tibet and China proper.<sup>174</sup> That the future development of the north-west provinces of India might depend upon great routes of commerce being opened to Central Asia, to the Caspian and to China was within the bounds of reasonable expectation.<sup>175</sup>

Few took any notice of the low return of trade.<sup>176</sup> Commissioners

174. T. Saunders, 'The Boundaries of Afghan Turkistan, with a view to the transit trade of the Upper Oxus', 10 January 1873. Annexe to No. 1 F.O. Confidential Prints, Central Asia, 1873-74.

175. Lumley to Stanley, 15 June 1867, M.P. 6. IIc.

176. In a report on the trade and resources of countries on the north-western boundary of British India, compiled in 1864, H. Davies gave the following estimate of the value of the trade between India and the countries beyond the mountain frontier of the Punjab.

|   |   | Imports<br>into<br>British<br>India | Exports<br>from<br>British<br>India | Total   |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------|
|   |   | £                                   | £                                   | £       |
| From<br>Afghanistan and<br>the countries<br>beyond. | By the Tater and<br>Abkhana Passes . . . . .  | 156,513                             | 120,643                             | 277,156 |
|   | By the Ghawailra and<br>Golera Pass . . . . . | 130,000                             | 164,000                             | 294,000 |
|   | By the Bolan Pass . . . . .                   | 31,870                              | 18,892                              | 50,762  |
| Jammu and Kashmir . . . . .                         | 199,950                                       | 184,900                             | 384,850                             |         |
| Ladak and Yarkund . . . . .                         | 9,170   | 14,434                              | 23,604                              |         |
|   | 527,503                                       | 502,869                             | 1,030,372                           |         |

Subsequently the following was the trend of trade in this region :

| Year   | Imports           |              | Exports         |              | Total             |              |
|--------|-------------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------|
|        | Quantity<br>Md.   | Value<br>Rs. | Quantity<br>Md. | Value<br>Rs. | Quantity<br>Md.   | Value<br>Rs. |
| 1871—2 | 273,901           | 54,54,745    | 105,836         | 27,35,305    | 379,737           | 81,90,050    |
| 1872—3 | 188,502           | 72,16,942    | 118,974         | 31,24,262    | 307,476           | 1,03,41,204  |
| 1873—4 | 175,624           | 40,60,145    | 106,506         | 20,09,554    | 282,130           | 60,69,699    |
|        | 1,092,410         |              |                 |              | 1,935,140         |              |
| 1874—5 | 54,018            |              | 842,730         | 1,00,15,103  | 54,018            | 2,15,89,563  |
|        | logs of<br>timber |              |                 |              | logs of<br>timber |              |

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The countries referred to : (a) Kashmir, Ladakh, Yarkand, Tibet and Bajour, and (b) Kabul, Tirah and Seistan. The report shows that the trade through the Western frontier amounted to 1,739,005 maunds in quantity and Rs. 2,03,29,252 in value, i.e. over 94 per cent of the external trade of the Punjab.

**KABUL TRADE**

| Year   | Imports         |              | Exports         |              | Total           |              |
|--------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
|        | Quantity<br>Md. | Value<br>Rs. | Quantity<br>Md. | Value<br>Rs. | Quantity<br>Md. | Value<br>Rs. |
| 1871—2 | 116,679         | 28,67,899    | 40,120          | 13,52,580    | 156,799         | 42,20,479    |
| 1872—3 | 62,265          | 13,57,638    | 16,084          | 8,60,365     | 79,349          | 22,18,003    |
| 1873—4 | 70,818          | 17,47,954    | 19,475          | 7,95,611     | 90,293          | 25,43,565    |
| 1874—5 | 594,762         | 52,53,628    | 382,014         | 61,08,795    | 976,776         | 1,13,62,423  |

It may be noted that much trade escaped registration in the old system when it was recorded in the chief marts only. By the year 1875, posts were established on the main routes of traffic for the purpose of registration. Yet it must be noted that as three-fourths of the trade passed through the chief marts the enormous rise in the volume of trade cannot be explained away on the grounds of non-registration.

Principal imports from Kabul : in 1874

|                        | Mds.    | Rs.       |
|------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Charas                 | 507     | 3,57,700  |
| Other drugs            | 4,014   | 1,43,877  |
| Dyes other than indigo | 35,487  | 4,63,533  |
| Fruits and nuts        | 91,840  | 8,38,480  |
| Silk                   | 3,463   | 18,38,480 |
| Furs and feathers      | —       | 1,82,750  |
| Wood                   | 286,388 | 5,69,431  |
| Not enumerated fibres  | 34,416  | 1,43,477  |
| Wheat                  | 43,616  | 1,29,266  |
| Wool                   | 6,751   | 87,461    |
| Spices                 | 4,535   | 75,978    |
| Metals                 | 7,269   | 75,926    |

Principal exports to Kabul : 1874-75

|                         | Mds.    | Rs.       |
|-------------------------|---------|-----------|
| Cotton cloth (Indian)   | 36,483  | 21,07,620 |
| Cotton cloth (European) | 11,378  | 9,80,771  |
| Tea                     | 10,266  | 14,63,530 |
| Leather                 | —       | 6,36,094  |
| Salt                    | 239,785 | 1,17,974  |
| Sugar                   | 6,234   | 90,096    |
| Silk                    | 110     | 68,283    |
| Metal                   | 1,537   | 58,701    |
| Wheat                   | 38,655  | 55,499    |
| Spices                  | 1,676   | 52,060    |

Apart from the Punjab trade, there was brisk trade through the Bolan and Shikarpur route. The Sind administration, in charge of recording

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were stationed at outlying posts.<sup>177</sup> A mercantile organisation called the Central Asian Trading Company was formed in 1873 with official backing.<sup>178</sup> In general, the reports of officials were far more hopeful than the facts justified. They exaggerated the size of the population,<sup>179</sup> the natural wealth of the country and the purchasing power of the natives.<sup>180</sup> There was a tendency to minimise the difficulties<sup>181</sup> which faced caravans. Even the British Chambers of

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the volume of this trade, was not as efficient as the Punjab authorities. Hence, the Sind reports are neither comprehensive nor very authoritative. Statistics and Commerce Department, 'Letter from Govt. of India', 17 October 1876, India Office Records, Vol. 15, pp. 1029-1042. Also see Forsyth, '*Progress of Trade with Central Asia*', London, 1877, pp. 28-30.

177. 'Appointment of a Commercial Agent in Ladakh...' P.P., H.C. Report No. 147 (1868-?), L., pp. 705-30. For removal of restrictions on Indian trade with Turkistan, see the treaty between the British Government and the Maharaja of Kashmir in 1870. C.U. Aitchison (ed.), '*A Collection of Treaties, Engagement and Sanada relating to India and the neighbouring Countries*', Vol. XI, Calcutta, 1909, pp. 272-7. See also Report on 'Palampore Fair', *Punjab Administration Report, 1867-68*. Addenda B, especially T.D. Forsyth, Commissioner and Superintendent, Jullundur Division, to J.A.E. Miller, Secy. to Financial Commissioner, Punjab, No. 82, 6 May 1867.
178. Northbrook to Salisbury, 21 July 1874, No. 132, (Political) enclosure, R.B. Shaw, Trade report of Ladakh for 1873. C.P.D. Vol. XXXVII.
179. For example, see '*The Report of A Mission to Yarkand*', Calcutta, 1875, Forsyth (ed.), for exaggerated views on the population of that country, ch. I, p. 62; also, Forsyth, '*Progress of Trade with Central Asia*', London, 1877, p. 12.
180. For example, Davies wrote on the prospect of Peshawar trade : 'The city (Kabul) has scarcely any manufactures of home fabric to offer for sale. Indeed the manufactures do not rise to mediocrity and are suitable only to the consumption of the lower and less wealthy classes. If great wealth does not prevail, people in easy circumstances are very numerous. A spirit of fashion predominates, and with it an appetite for novelties and superior fabrics of foreign countries. From the middle classes upward it would be difficult to find an individual clad in the product of native looms; even among the lower many are found little satisfied unless they carry on their heads the lunghis (turbans) or hide their feet in the shoes of Peshawar'. Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 20. Cf. Forsyth's description of the people of Yarkand as being wealthier and more civilised than the Indians under the British rule. Forsyth, 'Report on a Mission to Yarkand', *op. cit.*, p. 19, and ch. IX, on the prospect of Commerce.
181. For a typical example, 'Extract from a Private Letter, dated Kashgar, 4 Febrary 1874, from an Officer of the British Mission', Appendix IV, O.T. Burne, 'Historical Summary etc.' Memoranda, *op. cit.*, pp. 85-87.

Commerce appealed to the Government of India to promote trade with Central Asia.<sup>182</sup> They argued that if the commercial domination of British-made products was not established the Russians would seize the opportunity. The British had little real knowledge of either Russian power or intentions. But there was generally a sort of undefined fear that she would stretch forth her hands and sweep the whole commerce of Asia into her grasp, and that in order to compete with Russia they must sell better goods at a cheaper price and in larger quantities. Despite the artificial barrier, they would argue, tea brought by the Russians and their own piece goods were not approved by the people and sold at a low price in Bukhara and Samarkand ; that the Russian piece goods were sold only under the pressure of political authority in Kojand, Tashkent and Kokand ; that the Russian bleached long cloth was thinner than English long cloth, that their unbleached long cloth was coarse and rough and Russian 'mulmul' was very flimsy. In order to soothe the suspicion of English statesmen at home, the commercial interests welcomed fair competition in Central Asia and promises of an absolute command of the market were held out.<sup>183</sup> The immense advantages which Russia might gain from a discovery of Britain's vulnerable points were always invoked to sharpen the edge of purely commercial arguments.<sup>184</sup>

182. Northbrook to Argyll, 1 May 1873, No. 37, Secret; same to same, 9 June 1873, No. 50; Secret, C.P.D. Vol. XXXIII.

183. See for the arguments of the commercial interests :

- (a) 'Trade with Central Asia', Note by T.D. Forsyth, Commissioner and Superintendent, Jullundur Division, 1 August 1868. P.P. 1868-69, XLVI, Eastern India.
- (b) 'A Memorandum on Trade with Central Asia' by T.D. Forsyth, Calcutta, 1870, M. P. 6.
- (c) 'Proposed negotiation with Russia regarding Central Asia', Memo by T.D. Forsyth, 7 October 1869, M.P. 6.
- (d) No. 167, Government of India (Foreign Department), Political (Secret), 27 May 1869, FLI/Vol. II.
- (e) Lumley, No. 6, 'On the Tea Trade of Russia', P.P. 1867, LXX. C. 3896.
- (f) Lumley, 'Report on the Trade and manufacture of cotton in Russia', P.P. LIV. C. 477, 1865, pp. 438-91.
- (g) Report on the Silk Industries in India, 1874, P.P. vol. XLIX. C. 982, I.
- (h) 'Correspondence relating to the Mission of Mr. Douglas Forsyth to Yarkand', P.P./LI 1871 C. 60.

184. Forsyth, 'Proposed Negotiation with Russia', 7 October 1869, M.P. 6, p. 8.

Davies, in the report on Central Asian trade, expressed his satisfaction at the progress of trade of British piece goods at Bukhara since the days of Burnes, when the Peshawar route had been completely closed on account of the high duties imposed by Sultan Muhammad Khan.<sup>185</sup> Further East, the expulsion of the Chinese from Yarkand seemed to offer a better chance for the introduction of British goods and Indian tea than there had ever been before.<sup>186</sup> Lumley was only to confirm such speculations. He had shown how advantageous it would be if the Russian market could be opened to the cotton of the Punjab.<sup>187</sup> In his report on the tea trade he showed that a still more favourable market was open to the tea trade of the Himalayas in Central Asia; immediate advantage might be taken of it if traffic by the natural routes was not obstructed by restrictions on the part of the Kashmir and Kabul Durbar.<sup>188</sup> All sections of Indian commercial interests were eager to tap such potentialities. The British interests, comprising mainly tea, cotton piece goods and indigo, had their spokesmen in Forsyth<sup>189</sup> and Shaw<sup>190</sup> in the Punjab Administration to push them.<sup>191</sup> There were Hindu bankers and traders who worked through organised agency houses and

185. Davies, *op. cit.* (Report), p. 16.

186. See, for example, Major T.G. Montgomerie (ed.), '*Report on the Trans-Himalayan Exploration in connection with the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India*', 1868, para 81, p. LXIV M.P., 5.1.

187. Lumley, 'Report on Cotton', P.P., *op. cit.*

188. 'Here therefore, is the market for the Himalaya teas, a market of 8,000,000 consumers, amongst whom the taste of tea has been developed into a necessity, and who are now deprived of what has become to them a daily necessary of life—a market which is now open to the Indian cultivators under favourable condition...' Lumley, 'Report on tea etc.' P.P., *op. cit.*, p. 870.

189. Forsyth, Thomas Douglas (1827-1886); Indian civilian; Commissioner of the Punjab, 1860-72; visited as the Viceroy's agent to St. Petersburg in 1869, to Yarkand in 1870 and again in 1873; concluded commercial treaty with the Amir of Yarkand; obtained from the King of Burmah agreement that the Karunca state should be acknowledged independent.

190. Shaw, Robert Barkley (1839-1879); traveller; settled as tea-planter in Kangra in the Himalayas in 1859; first Englishman to reach Yarkand in 1868 and Kashgar in 1869; published account of travels, 1871; accompanied Forsyth on official mission to Yarkand in 1870; British joint commissioner in Ladakh; resident at Mandalay, 1878-79.

191. See for example, '*Punjab Administration Report, 1865-6*', pp. 342-344, Addenda B, 'Palampore Fair'. Also see G.J. Alder, *op. cit.*, ch. II (2), for the efforts of the 'Kangra group' to open up trade and political relations with Eastern Turkistan during 1869-76, pp. 38-57.

invested their surplus in trade, and whose activities extended as far as Bukhara and even Samarkand.<sup>192</sup> Evidence of their corporate action to bring pressure on the political authorities both in India and in Samarkand is often recorded in the official reports.<sup>193</sup> It was shown that there was already in existence a means of communication with these markets through the agency of long-established mercantile classes, such as the Kiraiakashes of Yarkand, the Parachas of Turkistan and the Povindas of the Golevi Pass, and exaggerated hopes were entertained of their becoming an influential comprador class.<sup>194</sup> 'It is under settled conditions that the fiery spirits of the restless Central Asiatics would find new channels for new actions', argued Forsyth. 'Even at the present time, famous as the Afghan is as a bold and skilled warrior, I venture to affirm that no keener hand at a commercial bargain can be found than the long-haired Kabulee, who is to be seen in the bazaars from Yarkand to Tashkand or in the streets of Calcutta.'<sup>195</sup> To the question as to whether trade with Central Asia was worth cultivating the answer was invariably in the affirmative. The Karakoram, it was argued, could not be abolished by treaty and must always remain a tremendous obstacle. Still, the tea and sugar of India 'ought to be able to cut out both Chinese and Russian rivalry'<sup>196</sup> and once the British were 'able to obtain an entrance to the Central Asian market', it was held, 'we are certain of competing successfully with the Russians'.<sup>197</sup> Of course, the unsophisticated market of Central Asia and Afghanistan was not suitable for European commercial penetration. But there was still ample scope for competition as regards tea, indigo, cotton piece goods, sugar, salt, spices, gold thread, hardware and other Indian commodities.

192. Burnes, '*Caboul*', *op. cit.*, ch. II, especially p.59. Also Schuyler, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-97.

193. For example, see Forsyth, 'Memorandum on Trade with Central Asia', M.P., *op. cit.*, p. 18, for the efforts of Hindustani and Afghan traders to press their representation on to the Russian General.

194. C.U. Aitchison, Secy. to Punjab Govt., to Sir W. Muir, Secy. to the Govt. of India, Foreign Department No. 8, 4 January 1868, quoted in para 60, Addenda B. *Punjab Administration Report, 1867-68*.

195. T.D. Forsyth, '*Progress of Trade in Central Asia*', London, 1877, p. 41.

196. 'Extract from a Private Letter, dated Kashgar, 4 February 1874 from the Office of the British Mission', being Appendix IV in O.T. Burnes' 'History Summary etc.', *op.cit.*, p. 85.

197. Forsyth to Miller, 6 May 1867, *Punjab Administration Report, 1867-8*.

From the commercial point of view the danger to British influence was threefold : the prohibitive duties charged by the Russians, those imposed by the Afghan Government and the ignorance of the traders. State action was invoked to meet these obstacles.<sup>198</sup> The solution suggested lay in keeping Bukhara beyond the exclusive influence of Russia, failing which means were to be adopted to keep the Oxus basin within the British sphere of influence. As regards the obstacles that were independent of Russian control, demands were made to help the Afghan ruler rationalise the frontier and internal customs of his country.<sup>199</sup> In fact, the Punjabee policy of limited liability in its external relations was finding difficulty in coping with the commercial forces engendered by its self-created economic impulses and more than once the Government of India found its hands forced by over-zealous provincial administrators.<sup>200</sup> So far as India was concerned, it was a period which witnessed a gradual erosion of faith in the *laissez faire* doctrine<sup>201</sup> and the government was being urged to ensure free trade in Central Asia. Commercial forces often complained of the utmost apathy on the subject in the attitude of the Government<sup>202</sup> and insisted on a broad distinction being made between political interference and international co-operation<sup>203</sup> ; they demanded the possibility of entering into friendly relations with a neighbouring power without becoming involved in the quarrels of others.<sup>204</sup>

198. 'Memo by Mr. Forsyth', 20 June, 1873, N.P/14, pp. 230-233 See also 'Memo by Mr. Forsyth', 10 June 1873, N.P/14, p.230.

199. T.D. Forsyth, 'A Memorandum on Trade with Central Asia', 1870, M.P. 6, p.20.

200. See *Punjab Administration Report 1866-7*, on the question of a representative in Leh, appointed somewhat over the head of the Central Government, and 'Note on Bokhara Envoy', January 1867, SalP, for the unauthorised invitation of the Bukhara Envoy, as illustrating the point.

201. S. Bhattacharya, *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. II. No. 1, January 1965.

202. 'Memo' by T.D. Forsyth, 20 June 1873, N.P/14, pp. 230-233.

203. T.D. Forsyth, 'Epitome of Events in Afghanistan since Dost Mohammed Khan's death', p. 23-24, M.P. 5.

204. Lawrence was against even sending a native agent for probing commercial possibilities. He was firmly of the opinion that the deputation of a Native Agent to trans-frontier country was 'undesirable and would be prepared absolutely to refuse compliance with request to that effect.' Sir R. Temple to C.U. Aitchison, No. 269, 12 February 1868, *Punjab Administration Report, 1868-69*.

As pressure built up in India in favour of an energetic foreign policy, there were serious misgivings in the Indian administration as to the efficiency of the traditional policy of non-intervention. During the course of its long history, the Punjabee tradition had undergone substantial modifications on several occasions. Dalhousie,<sup>205</sup> Canning<sup>206</sup> and Elgin<sup>207</sup> had time and again succumbed to the practical logic of the dissidents of the Punjabee school. Of course, the reaction of the Indian government to the course of events beyond the Indian frontier had not been consistent. Considered as isolated instances, therefore the policy appears somewhat erratic. The demands for economy, the panic and uncertainty of the uprising and its aftermath, the disinclination of the Home government towards any proliferation of commitments were factors to be reckoned with and, consequently, the essential trappings of the policy of 'non-interference' were retained. But the reservations which were gradually grafted onto it took much of its substance away.

A disintegrated Afghanistan, for example, had met with only a half-hearted response from Dalhousie and he was gradually veering towards the idea of an Afghan alliance, however loose and imprecise it might have been at its inception. In 1853, the Eastern Question had flared up and there was a serious threat of a Russo-Persian collaboration on the Herat front.<sup>208</sup> Dalhousie did not share all the exaggerated apprehensions of the men on the spot.<sup>209</sup> All the same, he would not 'shut his eyes and go to sleep' over assurances of

205. Ramsay, James Andrew Brown, tenth Earl of Dalhousie, (1812-1860); vice-president, Board of Trade, 1843-45; president, Board of Trade, 1845-56; Governor-General of India, 1848-56.

206. Canning, Charles John, Earl Canning (1812-1862); under-secretary, foreign affairs, 1841-6; postmaster-general, 1853-5; assumed the Governor-Generalship of India in February 1856.

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208. D.G.A. Baird, '*Private Letters of the Marquis of Dalhousie*', London, 1910, p. 288.

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security<sup>210</sup> for if Russia was permitted to push her authority beyond the desert to the North of the Aral she would be in a position to do infinite damage to British power in the East.<sup>211</sup> The result was the treaty relationship, established with the Dost in 1853, which was, despite its notorious one-sidedness and its limited liability, an important breakthrough.<sup>212</sup> In October 1855 Kandahar lost its Barakzai ruler and the Dost made himself master of it without opposition. Dalhousie viewed the problem as a purely Afghan affair and made no remonstrance with Dost Muhammad over its possession.<sup>213</sup> In his private correspondence, the Governor-General wrote: 'It seems very probable that Dost may succeed in extending his authority over all Candahar. If he should do so, our recently formed relations with him will, of course, render such an event extremely favourable to our interests.'<sup>214</sup> Obviously sympathy for Dost Muhammad was not ambiguous.<sup>215</sup> This new trend of British policy was soon to be confirmed by Canning, who in 1857, faced with a Persian war over Herat,<sup>216</sup> made a more dramatic bid for Afghan friendship. The

210. Baird, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

211. Dalhousie's Minutes, 26 September 1854, quoted in full in Mallet's 'Memo on Russia and England in Central Asia', Memorandum C. 84.

212. It was a short and simple document providing that there should be perpetual peace and friendship between the East India Company and the Amir Dost Muhammad and his heirs, that each party should respect the territory of the other and never interfere therein and the Amir further bound himself to be the 'friend of the friends and enemy of the enemies' of the British government.

213. On the treaty, Dalhousie wrote: 'Linked with the treaty concluded last year with the Khan of Khelat the treaty with Kabul covers..... every part of approach upon our western frontier.....and so far as the faith of treaties may be relied upon, it renders our border more hopelessly unassailable than before', 'Minutes', 30 April 1855, O.T. Burne, 'Historical Summary', C. 9, *op. cit.*

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treaty of 1857 was temporary in its application.<sup>217</sup> In fact, it was a visible expression of British sympathy with Afghan interests, then pitted against Persian encroachment. The treaty of Paris protected Herat from Persian machinations, but there was no article in it which involved a corresponding British engagement to prevent its incorporation into the Kabul empire.<sup>218</sup> In an official memorandum Canning sought the support of the Amir's government in the interest of a united Afghanistan. 'Instead of being content that Afghanistan should continue, divided, and thereby weak for offence, I would desire to see it united and strong—a compact barrier in our part. By encouraging this so far as lies in our power, at all events by not opposing it, we have a far better chance of extending our influence across the breadth of Afghanistan up to Herat than by laying down as a condition that Afghanistan shall be maintained in its own state of independence.'<sup>219</sup> Elgin acted on this assumption and the complication over Herat in 1862 enabled him to show his hand.<sup>220</sup> Despite the urgent request of the Home government to remonstrate effectively with Dost Muhammad with regard to his intended march upon Herat,<sup>221</sup> Elgin would not intervene and the policy of non-intervention in the Afghan quarrel was alluded to in support of his argument.<sup>222</sup> All that was done was to restrict the movement of

217. By the treaty, the British engaged to give to the Amir one lakh rupees monthly for the support of his army during the continuance of the war and it was stipulated that British officers with suitable establishments should be deputed to Kandahar and Balkh to see generally that the subsidy granted to the Amir be devoted to military purposes and to keep the Indian government informed of all affairs. See the text in Aitchison, *Treaties etc.*, op. cit., XI, p. 342.

218. The treaty of Paris, which brought the Persian war to a close, was signed on 4 March 1857.

219. Memoranda : A No. 3. 'Minutes, by Lord Canning', the Governor-General, 5 February 1857.

220. Sultan Jan, the ruler of Herat, attacked Farrah, which belonged to the province of Kandahar. This demanded reprisal. Sultan Jan was noted for his Persian proclivities. See, for details, J.W.S. Wyllie, 'Summary of Information regarding events in Afghanistan', 11 June 1865, MP. 5.

221. Wood to Elgin, 19 April 1862, 25 May 1862; WdP, Letter Book 19, Wood to Elgin, 9 August 1862, 25 August, 1862; WdP, Letter Book 11, pp. 50 and 80. See also J.L. Morison, 'Lord Elgin In India 1862-3', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. I especially pp. 193-4.

222. Elgin to Wood, 16 July 1862, Walrond's *Letters and journals of Lord Elgin*, op. cit., p. 417-8. Also Elgin to Wood, 9 August 1862, ibid, p. 419.

the native agent at Farrah as a symbolic gesture of British neutrality.<sup>223</sup>

The trend of British policy was soon to be reversed when Elgin fell too ill to recover, and with Lawrence<sup>224</sup> at the helm of the Indian government the traditional policy was applied in full. Unfortunately, his period of tenure in India coincided with the civil war in Afghanistan. During the course of the resultant anarchy, the policy of the Indian government was a matter of grave concern to the Afghan parties. The action of the Government of India may be briefly noted.<sup>225</sup> When war broke out, the British agent enquired what he was to do if the Sardars should offer to break away and make overtures to the British government. 'Am I to listen to and forward the representations of all', he wrote, 'or only the letter of Ameer Sher Ali Khan ?'<sup>226</sup> Sher Ali had sent off letters announcing his succession and these had reached the Government of India in July 1863, but no reply was sent for some months.<sup>227</sup> The agent was instructed to 'sit aside and watch the progress of events.'<sup>228</sup> Meanwhile Afzul had received a letter of condolence from the rulers of Bukhara and more positive interference by Bukhara on behalf of Afzul Khan was prevented only by the Russian operation towards the north of the

223. See, Elgin to Frere, 21 May 1863, as quoted in Morison, 'Lord Elgin etc.' *op. cit.*, pp. 194-5. Elgin had, however, made up his mind that if the Dost stopped, on his suggestion, at Herat, and if his enemy, ascribing his moderation to weakness pressed him, the Government of India was not 'to stand by and laugh at our dupe, telling him that though our advice got him into the scrape, he must find his way out of it all by himself.' Elgin to Wood, 16 July 1862, Walrond, *op. cit.*, p. 416.

224. Dost Muhammad died in June, 1863; Elgin died in November, 1863; Lawrence succeeded in January, 1864.

225. For the civil war, the following official accounts may be consulted: J.S. Wyllie, 'Summary of Information in Afghanistan from Dost Muhammad's death to the Battle of Shekhabad', 11 June 1866, M.P. 5; T.D. Forsyth, 'Epitome of Events in Afghanistan since Dost Muhammad's Death', M.P. 5. The history of Afghan Turkistan during the period of crisis in J. T. Wheeler, 'Memorandum on Afghan Turkistan', *op. cit.*

226. 'Kabul diary', December, 1861, No. 134; July 1863, No. 141; September, 1863, no. 92. P.P. LVI (1878-9) C. 2190.

227. P.P. (A) September, 1863, No. 92, *ibid.*

228. P.P. (A) November 1863, No. 92, *ibid.* On 8 December, 1863, Denison, the acting Governor-General, wrote a formal letter acknowledging Sher Ali's communications, but no formal recognition of his title was made. No. 237, *ibid.*

Bukharan territory.<sup>229</sup> Even the Commissioner of Peshawar had recommended the immediate recognition of Amir Sher Ali.<sup>230</sup> It was, however, decided that nothing could be done unless the government was satisfied that Sher Ali's accession would be accepted by the Afghan nation ; at the same time Elgin's illness only provided the necessary excuse for an officially unaccountable delay.<sup>231</sup> Upon the termination of the first civil war, Sher Ali was recognised and his son was acknowledged as heir apparent.<sup>232</sup> The Afghans, however, resumed fighting and Lawrence concluded that the recognition of the *de facto* ruler was to be the principal hinge on which his Afghan policy was to turn. 'Our relations should always be with the *de facto* ruler of the day', he wrote, 'and so long as the *de facto* ruler is not unfriendly to us, we should always be prepared to renew with him the same terms and favourable conditions as obtained under his predecessor. In this way we shall be enabled to maintain our influence in Afghanistan far more effectually than by any advance of troops, a contingency which could only be contemplated in the last resort which would unite as one man the Afghan tribes against us, and would paralyze our finances.'<sup>233</sup> Evidently, such a policy encouraged pretenders, and successful rulers of Kabul were recognised as rulers despite the fact that Sher Ali at no time lost control of all the territories of Afghanistan. Encouraged by this strange demeanour of the British government, the rival leaders often sent letters and petitions to the Government of India.<sup>234</sup> Of course,

229. Talboy Wheeler, 'Memorandum on Afghan Turkistan', *op. cit.*, p. 65.

230. *Ibid.*, February 1864, No. 203.

231. *Ibid.*, No. 287.

232. In fact, Gulam Haider Khan and Rafik Khan, the Afghan agents, had put forward to the Commission of Peshawar on 28 February 1864, the following requests (a) that friendly alliance and moral support be unreservedly continued, (b) that a formal treaty of friendship be entered into between the British Government and Sher Ali and his heirs in perpetuity, (c) that in such a treaty the words 'now in possession' attached to his title of ruler of Afghanistan be omitted, (d) a request for 6,000 muskets, (e) Sardar Mohammad Ali Khan be recognised as heir apparent and (f) an Afghan convict at Calcutta be pardoned. The Government of India granted (e) and (f); (d) was rejected while (a), (b) and (c) were ignored. See, Wyllie's 'Summary etc.', *op. cit.*

233. Lawrence to Secretary of State, 3 September 1867, 'Memorandum', A. 19.

234. For example, the petitions of the Shahzada of the late Durrani family at Ludhiana; of Amir Khan in September 1863; of Sher Ali, Azim Khan and Afzul Khan. See Forsyth's 'Epitome', *op. cit.*, and Wyllie's 'Summary', *op. cit.*

arms and money were not forthcoming to any of them, but neither was any official discouragement from acts of rebellion.<sup>235</sup> Such an act might have damped the initiatives of energetic spirits. But even the *de facto* ruler of Kabul was not recognised as the Amir of Afghanistan; on the contrary, throughout almost the whole period Afghanistan was parcelled out among several *de facto* rulers who were recognised as such by the British government.<sup>236</sup> They were encouraged to form definite alliances and congratulated on their success.<sup>237</sup> Asylum was readily available for Afghan refugees in British territory, whence fresh movements were often undertaken to add to the general instability. During the Kandahar campaign of Sher Ali, for example, Azim Khan, then in British territory, was allowed to re-embark upon the scene from the north,<sup>238</sup> much to the annoyance of Sher Ali.<sup>239</sup> It appears that the Punjabees had a certain sympathy for Azim Khan. It was often appreciated in official memoranda that he had been the nucleus of British sympathy in Afghanistan during the uprising of 1857 and had done much to restrain Ghilzai passions.<sup>240</sup> Thus, despite the formal recognition accorded by Lawrence to Sher Ali, the British agent was withdrawn and the newly appointed agent, Atta Muhammad, lingered about Peshawar, ostensibly on the pretext of bad weather and general insecurity.<sup>241</sup> This might be contrasted with the spontaneous recognition of Azim even before he wrote to the Government of India announcing his succession.<sup>242</sup> Azim did not fail to discern

235. For example, see the reply to Azim Khan, No. 96, P.P. LVI (1878-9), C. 2190.

236. Forsyth's 'Epitome', *op.cit.*; also J. Talboys Wheeler, 'Afghan Turkistan', *op.cit.*

237. Cf. advice to Azim's representative in November 1863, Wyllie's 'Summary', *op. cit.*, p. 3.

238. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

239. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

240. *Ibid.*, p. 12.

241. Forsyth, 'Epitome', *op. cit.*, p. 6.

242. Forsyth, 'Epitome', *op. cit.*, p. 6; Wyllie, 'Summary', *op. cit.*, p. 34. Even Atta Muhammad resumed his post at Kabul at the durbar of Azim following such recognition. Even more interesting is the 'unauthorised' prayer by the British Munshee at Kabul at the Central Mosque for 'Azim and for the conquest of Afghanistan.' The Government of India denounced the action of the Munshee and ordered his withdrawal, but it was subsequently resumed 'at the united recommendation of the Commissioner of Peshawar and the Punjab Government', Wyllie, 'Summary', *op. cit.*, pp. 34-5.

British sympathy and make use of it in the domestic contest.<sup>243</sup> To justify his instruction 'to negative the quests' for aid by Sher Ali, Lawrence wrote, 'I do not think that on this account we should depart from the position of neutrality we have assumed in the struggle between the different members of the Barakzai family.' This lofty idealism ended on a very practical note : 'Sher Ali', he concluded, 'can never prove a friend worth helping, I fear.'<sup>244</sup>

It is true that the policy of non-interference had the approval of the Home authorities. The India Office would have resented any policy that might have thrown the share of imperial expenses on the shoulders of British tax-payers.<sup>245</sup> There were, however, considerable reservations in the attitudes of the India Office, which made no secret of them. Wood had been against meddling in Afghan politics, but, unlike Lawrence would have viewed Herat as an exclusively Afghan affair. Herat was indispensable, he wrote, for invasion of India, although it did not follow that its possession was 'enough to enable anybody to invade us'.<sup>246</sup> Hence he could not be philosophically detached about its fate. In 1862, he wrote officially to the Governor-General to remonstrate with the Dost ; but he had never wished to do anything specific nor did he expect that he would have an opportunity of doing anything. 'I think that the despatch was carefully worded', he wrote privately, 'so as to relieve you from any necessity of action'.<sup>247</sup> He did not think that it signified 'to us whether there are three or two rulers or only one chief in Afghanistan'.<sup>248</sup> The British policy was to make 'the Afghans whoever and whatever they may be our western bulwark',<sup>249</sup> and the strength of a non-interference policy accordingly lay in the fact that intervention in response to an immediate imperative would always be more effective than 'any previous attempt to arrange matters'. Of course, he argued, 'we could always buy them'.<sup>250</sup> The Afghans, he believed, were not easily assailable at home, nor were they formidable as assailants, and their internal jealousies would keep them from foreign aggression.

243. P.P., May 1864, no. 77.

244. Lawrence to Cranborne, 18 October 1866, SalP.

245. Charles Wood to Canning, WdP. Letter Book I, 25 June 1859.

246. Wood to Elgin, 25 May 1862, WdP. Letter Book 10, p. 276. Also see Wood to Lawrence, 15 October 1864, No. 55, LawP. 25.

247. Wood to Elgin, 25 August 1862, WdP. Letter Book 11, p. 88; LawP. 25.

248. Wood to Elgin, 17 April 1862, WdP. Letter Book 9, p. 270.

249. Wood to Elgin, 25 May 1862, WdP. Letter Book 10, p. 280.

250. Wood to Elgin, 19 April 1862, WdP. Letter Book 9, p. 270.

But then, 'I am a disciple of non-intervention,' he wrote, 'not in a Talleyrand's sense.'<sup>251</sup> In 1863, Wood remonstrated with Elgin over the Umbeylla expedition as an attempt to set up a permanent influence in Kabul. 'I agree,' he wrote, 'with the policy which the Afghan expedition was intended to establish, but the policy lately pursued towards Dost Muhammad is far sounder.'<sup>252</sup> It was not long before he insisted that Sher Ali should be recognised.<sup>253</sup>

Cranborne, who succeeded Wood in the India Office, approved of Lawrence's 'observant attitude' towards the contending parties in Afghanistan but only as a temporary measure.<sup>254</sup> When there was so much room for Russia, he argued, to the east of Bukhara, it would be sheer wantonness on her part to affront the British by turning to the south.<sup>255</sup> 'We are strong enough', he maintained, to give them a warm reception whenever they do come.' Hence; there seemed no need 'to disturb ourselves prematurely on the subject.'<sup>256</sup> Northcote gave Lawrence his support, provided Russia remained out of Afghan politics. Any interference on their part was to be countered by a matching response from British India.<sup>257</sup>

In fact, all through the sixties, the Home government was becoming vaguely aware of the realities presented by the Russian menace, although its response to such a probability was gradual and cautiously guarded.<sup>258</sup> Hammond explained the British stand : 'As we certainly should not attempt until they (Russians) have advanced much further to resist their encroachment by fire of arms, it is more dignified to believe them rather than exhibit excessive distrust.'<sup>259</sup> By 1869, such a line seemed to have been adopted by the Russians. The civil persuasions of Lord Russell<sup>260</sup> had failed to keep the Russians to the line of Syr Daria and their troops were found to be engaged in Bukhara and Kokand ostensibly in search of a settled population.

251. Wood to Elgin, 9 August 1862, WdP. Letter Book 11, p. 50.

252. Wood to Lawrence, 24 December 1863, LawP. 25 (Index).

253. Wood to Lawrence, 5 January 1864, LawP. 25.

254. Cranborne to Lawrence, 17 August 1866, SalP.

255. *Ibid.*

256. Cranborne to Lawrence, 2 October 1866, SalP.

257. Andrew Lang, '*Sir Stafford Northcote, First Earl of Iddesleigh*', Vol. II, London, 1890, p. 123.

258. See A.P. Thornton, 'The re-opening of the Central Asian Question 1864-9', *History*, XLI (1956), pp. 122-36.

259. Hammond to Buchanan, 16 August 1868, B.P. in Letter : 1868.

260. See A.P. Thornton, 'The re-opening of Central Asian Question etc.', *op.cit.*

The success of Yakub Beg and the Muslim uprising in Yarkand had brought trans-Himalayan Turkistan within the sphere of the political instability characteristic of Central Asian politics. The pressure of the Russians was felt on Persia as the Cossack army marched from Assoorada to Kransvodsk in preparation for opening the route to Khiva. Immediately beyond the tribal belt of the north western frontier, the situation looked no more cheerful. The repeated recognition by the Indian government of the *de facto* ruler had only driven Sher Ali to turn to Meshed for aid and inspiration. In fact, under the pressure of altered circumstances, the precarious balance of power in the Afghan civil war seemed all but upset, beyond the exertions of frontier pro-consuls operating from Derajat, Bannu and Peshawar. The Central Asian policy, having lost its direction took on the appearance of a patchwork of temporary expediency. Even Lawrence advocated action not only to ensure Afghan friendship in the hour of Sher Ali's triumph but also to contain Russia.<sup>261</sup> It was a desperate action—a somewhat tragic tergiversation in the evening of his distinguished Indian career. The immediate response of the Home government was still half-hearted.<sup>262</sup> But, by 1869, Clarendon had entered the Foreign Office. In India, the young and imaginative Mayo<sup>263</sup> succeeded Lawrence. The Afghan Question was to be given a new direction and sense of purpose.

261. Viceroy in Council to Secretary of State for India, 3 September 1876, No. 10, P.P. LVI, C. 2190.

262. Secretary of State for India to the Governor-General of India, 26 December 1867, No. 12, *ibid*, pp. 24-6.

263. Bourke, Richard Southwell, sixth Earl of Mayo (1822-72); Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1852, 1858-9 and 1866-8; Viceroy and Governor-General of India, 1869-72; assassinated at Port Blair.

## **2 | Afghanistan and the Foreign Office 1869-74**

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Afghanistan was the fulcrum of the Central Asian Question which was formally introduced into the diplomatic dialogue between London and St. Petersburg in 1869. In this chapter an attempt will be made to examine the Afghan question as viewed from the Foreign Office during the period of the Liberal administration. In a sense, the motivations for the resumption of talks under Clarendon were similar to those which had inspired the more abortive measures of Russell four years before.<sup>1</sup> There was a similar reluctance on the part of the authorities in London to encounter Russian diplomacy in the unknown regions of Central Asia. An equally strong determination to hold India in subordination to London in relation to the larger ramifications of the Afghan Question marked the policies of the Home government. Nonetheless, the new diplomatic initiative was more definitive both in principle and in its details. The authorities, both in London and Calcutta, had by now agreed on the expediency of committing Russia to a fixed line on the map. What they desired was a definite understanding which might be invoked in the event of a suspected act of hostility. The Foreign Office sought to realise the idea in terms of a neutral zone, interposed between the two Imperial frontiers in Asia. Mayo proposed the concept of spheres of influence to achieve a parallel effect. Obviously, there remained an intrinsic divergence of perspectives and a consequent conflict of opinion between Whitehall and the men on the spot. In policy-making, therefore, there was a natural rivalry for precedence between the two sets of opinion. Clarendon having set the tone, the negotiations proceeded in the initial stages with little regard to Indian interests. As the 'long and

1. See A.P. Thornton, 'The re-opening of the Central Asian Question, 1864-69', *History*, XLI (1956), pp. 122-36.

languid'<sup>2</sup> conversation took its course, the views of the Government of India found increasing ascendancy in the language of the Foreign Office. However, the belated conversion of the Home government to Indian opinion was more in the nature of a reluctant accommodation. In tempo it was gradual, and in extent, only partial. It is small wonder that the resultant compromise of the Granville-Gortchakoff convention of 1873 fell far short of the hopes and calculations of the Indian government.

Clarendon was the only British Secretary in the nineteenth century to have had a legation,<sup>3</sup> and his experience of diplomatic procedure enabled him to distinguish types of diplomatic action. A master of conversational diplomacy, he had always been interested in, and attracted to, negotiation ; its flexibility appealed to his highly professional mind.<sup>4</sup> In reviewing Central Asian politics, Clarendon was naturally sensitive to the growing uneasiness in Anglo-Indian minds, occasioned by the dramatic extensions of the Russian frontier since 1865. By 1868, the Russian position in Central Asia had assumed dangerous proportions for British interests. The changing political spectrum of Turkistan had unnerved even the prophet of masterly inactivity, who had hastened to recommend diplomatic action to contain Russia. Russia, he said, should be told that it could not be permitted to interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan or in those of any State which lay continuous with the Indian frontier.<sup>5</sup> 'If this failed', Lawrence maintained, 'we might give that power to understand that an advance towards India, beyond a certain point, would entail on her war, in all parts of the world, with England.'<sup>6</sup> Stanley would not have it. Clarendon now picked up the thread where Lawrence had left off.

He saw clearly that a legitimate satisfaction of Russia's mission in Asia need in no way rival the British position in India.<sup>7</sup> He was also amenable to Gortchakoff's reasoning that Russia could not be expected to maintain her present frontier in Asia in view of the hostility of the Khanates to her commercial interests.<sup>8</sup> There

2. Hansard, ccxv, p. 852.

3. Minister at Madrid, 1833-39.

4. M.R. Robson, 'Lord Clarendon and the Cretan Question, 1868-9', *The Historical Journal*, III i (1960), p. 55.

5. P.P. 1878-9, LVI, C. 2190, p. 43.

6. Lawrence's 'Memo', 25 November 1868, enclosed with above.

7. Clarendon to Buchanan, 3 March 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

8. Clarendon to Buchanan, 10 November 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

remained, however, the grave political and military implications of an unbridled Russian expansion and Clarendon was alive to the issue. A forward policy, he told the Russian ambassador, came naturally to the military authorities posted on the frontiers of a growing Empire.<sup>9</sup> There were always, he noted, frontiers to be improved, broken engagements to be repaired, or some faithless ally to be punished.<sup>10</sup> Plausible reasons were seldom wanting for the acquisition of territory which the Home government never thought it expedient to reject. He conceded that these were the very processes that had in the main brought about the extension of the British Empire in India. It seemed likely that they would be repeated in the case of Russia in Asia.<sup>11</sup> Such being the state of affairs, 'an aspiring Russian General had only to league with a malcontent prince of India to set the frontiers smouldering.'<sup>12</sup> Thus Clarendon, unlike Russell, was not content with a mutual exchange of friendly notes. The sincerity of the Emperor's pacific disposition, it was maintained, was not enough to ensure that 'such intentions were sufficiently known and imposed upon the Generals who were carrying (sic) in Central Asia'.<sup>13</sup> The integrity of Persia was no longer considered an adequate safeguard for British interests in Central Asia. On this score, it was Afghanistan, its status and frontiers, both as an independent question as well as in relation to the fate of the Uzbeg states beyond the Oxus, that troubled the minds of British statesmen. As a trained diplomat, Clarendon was convinced that if British interests were to be guaranteed there could be no question of imposing any decision by armed forces. The sharp edge of the Russian threat, as he saw it, might be neutralised without incurring any extension of direct commitments beyond the tribal belt enclosing India and without infringing the freedom of action of the parties concerned.

The new attitude of the British Foreign Office found considerable publicity in the British press during the early months of 1869.<sup>14</sup> The

9. Clarendon to Buchanan, 27 March 1869, F.O. 65/870, No. 88.

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*; Clarendon to Buchanan, 10 November, 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

12. Clarendon to Buchanan, 27 March 1869, F.O. 65/870, No. 88.

13. Clarendon to Buchanan, 4 August 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

14. '*The Times*', in particular, came out with suggestions for a mutual adjustment of interests in Central Asia. See for example, '*The Times*', 15 February and 22 February 1869. It called for a joint front against 'the implacable foes of Christianity and Civilisation.' The Central Asian Question, according to the daily, depended on the virtual neutralisation of Afghanistan.

weather seemed favourable for the diplomatic kite to be flown from London while writers in the *Moscow Gazette*<sup>15</sup> reciprocated with a firm repudiation of the idea that Russia would ever contemplate the conquest of India.<sup>16</sup> In private correspondence, Baron Brunnow, the Russian ambassador in London, did not mince his words with reference to the rapid advance of Russian troops and the desirability of allaying the consequent uneasiness.<sup>17</sup> It was into such an atmosphere of optimism that Clarendon threw his suggestion for the recognition of some territory as 'neutral' between the possessions of Britain and Russia, 'which should be the limit of those possessions and scrupulously be maintained by both the parties.'<sup>18</sup> The primary concern of Clarendon's diplomacy was to prevent an adjacent frontier in Asia and the 'neutral zone'<sup>19</sup> was to effect the desired objective.<sup>20</sup> It

15. 'The *Moscow Gazette*' was an entirely independent journal. Buchanan however, had reason to believe that it frequently received inspiration from Prince Gorthchakoff. Cf. Buchanan to Clarendon, 24 February 1869, F.O. 539/9, No. 3.
16. Extract from '*Moscow Gazette*', 20 February 1869, Enclosure in *ibid.* There was a remarkable similarity of views between the arguments suggested in these articles and those of the official despatches that subsequently followed. In this sense, the dialogue between the Russian and the English press during February and March, 1869, foreshadowed the basic approaches of the respective governments over the proposed Central Asian 'understanding'.
17. Clarendon to Buchanan, 27 March 1869, F.O. 65/870, No. 88.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Closely following the analysis of Dodwell, Alder comes to the conclusion that the neutral zone as a practical proposition foundered almost at once, and instead, the negotiations centred on the more specific issue relating to the northern limit of Afghanistan. See, C.J. Alder, '*British India's Northern Frontier, 1865-96*', London, 1963, p. 166; also see, H.H. Dodwell (ed.), '*The Cambridge History of British Empire*', Vol. V, Cambridge, 1832, ch. XXIII, p. 409. Thornton takes a similar view although he does not suggest when the idea of neutral zone was dropped. See A.P. Thornton, 'Afghanistan in the Anglo-Russian diplomacy', *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. XI (1953-55), p. 204. Habberton concludes that the concept of a neutral zone was dropped, once and for all, at Heidelberg in the autumn of 1869; cf. W. Habberton, 'Anglo-Russian Relations concerning Afghanistan, 1837-1907', p. 25, *University of Illinois, Studies in Social Sciences*, Vol. XXI, 1937. The present author believes that the idea of a neutral zone was carried far into the course of the negotiations and it formed the core of the conversations until 1871 when the English abandoned it. As the Russians stuck to it, its impact was discernible even in the final communication which terminated the negotiations.
20. Baron Brunnow to Prince Gorthchakoff, 5/7 April, 1869, F.O. 539/9, No. 23.

is more than obvious that a proposition on these lines presupposed the determination of the Foreign Secretary not to entertain any claim of Indian interests other than those of defensive strategy.

The idea of converting Central Asia into a sort of Belgium and introducing the Khanates into the sphere of international law did not evoke any favourable response from the Russians. If, argued the Russian Press, Russia were to bind herself formally not to go beyond Samarkand or Bukhara, and Britain not to send her troops into Afghanistan, such mutual obligations would be the best possible means of drawing the two countries into interminable quarrels with 'the wild tribes who can only be made to feel weakness by opposition of forces.'<sup>20</sup> It is in the light of Russian observations on the proposals for a 'neutral zone' that an attempt may be made to appreciate Gortchakoff's much misunderstood despatch<sup>21</sup> in reply to Clarendon's proposal. Having emphasised the principle of an 'intermediary zone',<sup>22</sup> Gortchakoff gave a positive assurance that Afghanistan, as marked on the map<sup>23</sup> supplied by the British Foreign Office, would be considered as being beyond the sphere of Russian influence.<sup>24</sup> In relation to this proposed 'intermediary zone' Russia, however, was to retain the right to chastise the Amir if he should give her trouble.<sup>25</sup> The British, for their part, were to continue the policy of abstention, as developed by Lawrence, and recommended by Gortchakoff as the policy of 'profound wisdom'.<sup>26</sup> A commitment to a policy of limited liability by Britain would thus have precluded the Indian government from inaugurating any system of offence against Russian interests. As to the final limit of Russian activity, Gortchakoff regarded Brunnow's assurances as overambitious.<sup>27</sup> On

21. Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 27 February 1869, F.O. 539/9, No. 18.

22. Dodwell suggests that the despatch pointed to Afghanistan as an appropriate 'neutral zone'. See Dodwell, *op. cit.*, p. 409; Habberton, *op. cit.*, p. 24; Thornton, *op. cit.*, p. 211; Alder, *op. cit.*, p. 116. However, what Gortchakoff sought was a "Zone indépendante qui les perserverait de tout compact immediat .." Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 27 February/7 March, P.P. LXXV, 1853, C. 704.

23. This is Philips' 'Persia'.

24. Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 27 February/7 March, P.P. LXXV, 1853, C. 704.

25. Brunnow to Gortchakoff, 5/7 April 1869, F.O. 539/9, No. 23.

26. Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 27 February/7 March 1869, P.P. 1873, C. 704.

27. Brunnow assured that the desire of the Russian Government was 'to restrict rather than extend the possessions of Russia southwards in Central Asia.' Clarendon to Buchanan, 27 March 1869, F.O. 65/870, No. 88.

the contrary, it would be enough, Gortchakoff thought, to say that Russian authorities in those quarters were 'desirous not to extend'.<sup>28</sup> All that he meant was that anything beyond Afghanistan should be considered as within the sphere of Russian influence.<sup>29</sup>

An agreement on these lines seemed fairly acceptable to the British Foreign Office. Thus the proposal met, not with an outright rejection, but with Clarendon's conditional acceptance.<sup>30</sup> Under the guarantee of the Russian assurance, it was felt that the proposed 'intermediary zone' went a long way towards realising his original scheme of a neutralised zone and it was treated as such.<sup>31</sup> Clarendon was uncertain of its limits, and to refer the matter to the experts of the India office seemed an essential prerequisite to a formal agreement.<sup>32</sup>

Meanwhile, the authorities in London and St. Petersburg were busy ruminating over the Afghan knot and the trans-frontier relations of the Government of India were being recast under the new Viceroy. Mayo had arrived in India with fervent hopes for the success of the imperial destiny of the British in India.<sup>33</sup> Under his direction, the Government of India seemed bent upon the projection of the Indian administration into the world of the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> He was supremely confident of the superiority of the moral and material power of the British in Asia to that of Russia.<sup>35</sup> 'We are in possession of an enormous influence', he exclaimed, 'great wealth and complete organisation; we are established, compact and strong...'. In comparison, Russia, it appeared, was exactly the reverse.<sup>36</sup> It was this feeling of 'our enormous power' which prompted him to disbelieve the rumours of Russia's military designs on India.<sup>37</sup> Russia was perhaps, he would argue, wholly ignorant of the strength of British influence in India.<sup>38</sup> Britain was a satisfied power and it was her maturity which justified, according to Mayo, the assumption of a passive policy 'which though it may be carried a little too far' was right in principle.<sup>39</sup> But Britain could no

28. Rumbold to Clarendon, 7 April 1869, ClarP. C. 482.

29. Rumbold to Clarendon, 9 June 1869, ClarP. C. 482.

30. Clarendon to Buchanan, 27 March 1869, F.O. 65/870, No. 88.

31. *Ibid.*

32. *Ibid.*

33. Mayo to Buchanan, 20 September 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

34. G.R.G. Hambley, 'Richard Temple and the Government of India', unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Cambridge, 1958, p. 67.

35. Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, M.P. 36.

36. Mayo to Rawlinson, 2 September 1869, M.P. 36, No. 227.

37. Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 May 1869, M.P. 39, No. 131.

longer be expected to maintain a Tibetan policy in the East.<sup>40</sup> Such a policy, he claimed, had been tried and had failed. With the 'Asiatics', he held, a bold policy was the first element of success.<sup>41</sup> 'Let us try and fringe India', Mayo wrote, 'with strong and independent, friendly, though not altogether neutral, states, and we shall be in a position of strength and safety we never were in before.'<sup>42</sup> It would be to the advantage of the British, he claimed, to maintain in these states 'that moral influence which was inseparable from the true interest of the strongest power in Asia'.<sup>43</sup> Such moral ascendancy was to be achieved by influence, example and persuasion, indeed by 'every art that diplomacy places within our reach'.<sup>44</sup> It might take years to develop this policy, Mayo argued; but once established, recognised and appreciated, 'our Empire', he assured, 'would be comparatively secure'.<sup>45</sup>

In pursuit of his project of an informal empire, Mayo was not slow to appreciate the implications of the Russian advances for British interests in Central Asia. 'We may look forward to a possible attempt on their part in Central Asia absolutely to prohibit trade from Hindustan. They never made a greater blunder. If, however, what we are inclined to suspect turns out to be true and she is going to try and raise a frontier line of Prohibitory customs duties against our Trade, she must be driven out of it.' It was impossible, Mayo claimed, that 'Russia could in face of modern Europe defend a policy of Prohibitory Customs'.<sup>46</sup> He warmly welcomed commercial competition with Russia in Central Asia and the outcome of such a game appeared to him a foregone conclusion.<sup>47</sup> But 'Russia cannot be expected,' he debated with his temporising superior, 'to manage the stupendous task in Asia all by herself.' Would not the British policy of trade and influence be beneficial to Russian interests?<sup>48</sup>

38. Mayo to Rawlinson, 2 September 1869, M.P. 36, No. 227.

39. *Ibid.*

40. 'Memorandum on Persia', by Mayo, 29 December 1871, Arg. P. Reel 312; the same in M.P. 5; Also Mayo to Durand, 1 July 1869, M.P. 40/3, No. 215.

41. *Ibid.*

42. Mayo to Bartle Frere, 27 May 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 88; Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, M.P. 36/3.

43. Memo on Persia by Mayo, 29 December 1871, Arg. P. Reel 312.

44. *Ibid.*

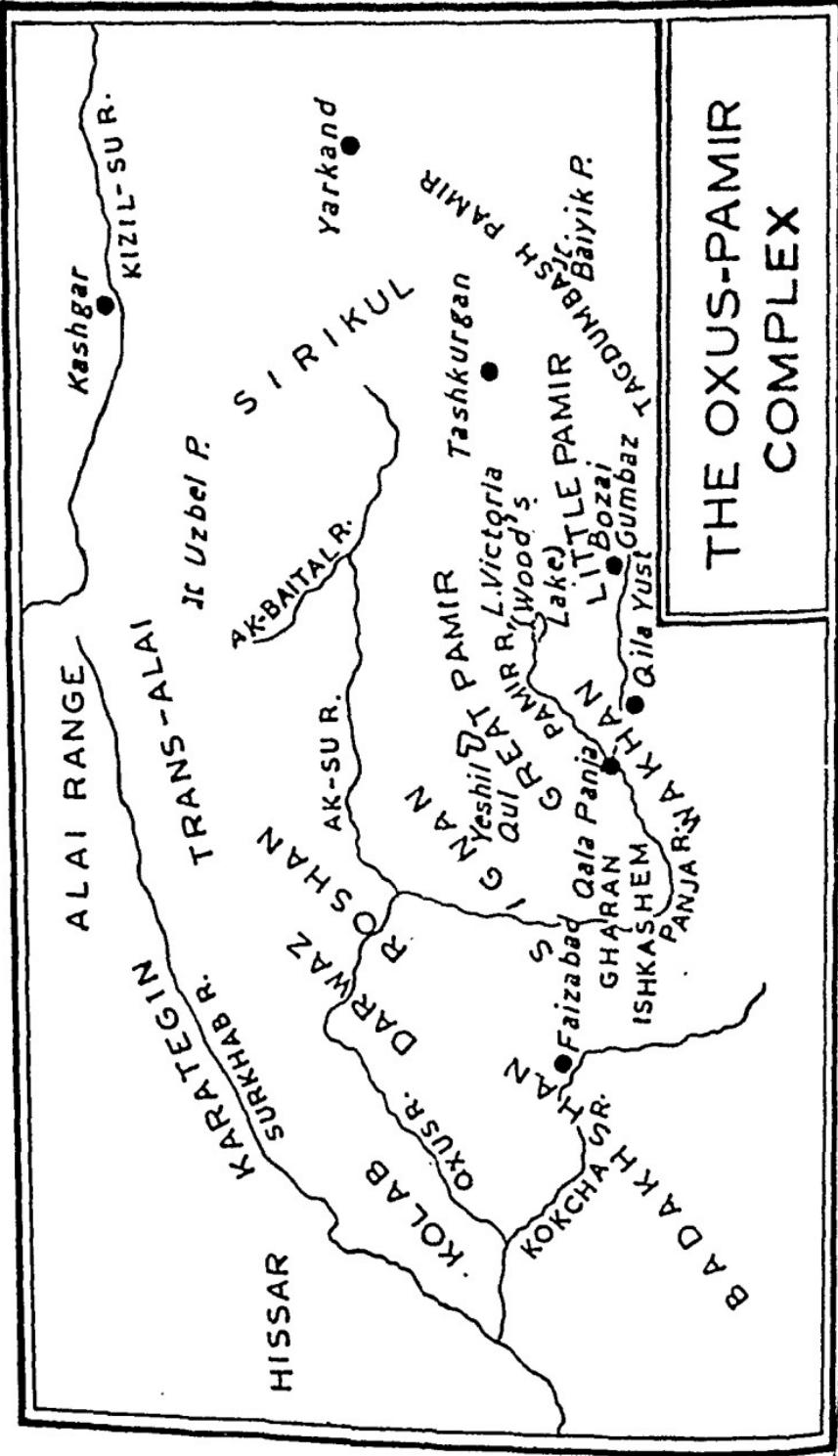
45. *Ibid.*

46. Mayo to Frere, 27 May 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 88.

47. Mayo to Rawlinson, 2 September 1869, M.P. 36/2, No. 227.

48. Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 138.

## THE OXUS-PAMIR COMPLEX



treaties.<sup>56</sup> The secret despatch of June 1869<sup>57</sup> set out the views of the Government of India as a corrective to Clarendon's diplomacy. In substance it was a plea for an agreement with Russia on an 'intermediary zone' with Afghanistan and Bukhara as its two wings, and with the Oxus defining the frontier of Afghanistan.<sup>58</sup>

Diplomacy, however, proceeded with little regard to Indian opinion. The recommendations of Argyll<sup>59</sup>, who had studied<sup>60</sup> the Russian despatch, were forwarded to the Russian government.<sup>61</sup> As regards the terms of assurance on Afghanistan, the India Office thought it went as far as could be expected.<sup>62</sup> But as regards the geographical extent of the 'zone neutral', the India Council was of the unanimous opinion that 'if possible' they ought to get the same assurances as regards Eastern Turkistan.<sup>63</sup> Besides, it was considered 'convenient' to have some understood geographical boundary.<sup>64</sup> Argyll was aware of the difficulties 'in engagements so vague and general as those proposed to "condescend" on geographical limits.'<sup>65</sup> It was therefore argued that there was no more fruitful source of difference than a vague definition of a frontier which was to be sought for in a desert. It would thus be better to lay down that the neutral zone should be defined by a parallel of latitude, which could be appealed to. 'What appeal could be made to an Afghan

56. Mayo to Forsyth, 19 August 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 204.

57. No. 172, Government of India, Foreign Department (secret), 3 June 1869, FLI/15.

58. *Ibid.* The dispatch urged that Russia be called upon to place herself in some position as regards to Khiva, the unoccupied part of Bukhara and the independent tribes along the frontier as the Government of India was willing to do as regards Khelat, Afghanistan or Yarkand, that is to say, 'to recognise and secure their independence, but to continue to exercise over them friendly influence with an unquestioned force of punishing them, if they misbehaved.' If the Russians would consent to this, Mayo wrote with an optimistic note, 'I am inclined to believe that the Central Asian Question would cease to exist.' Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/9, No. 103.

59. George Douglas Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, (1823-1900); Secretary of State for India, 1868-74.

60. Argyll to Clarendon, undated April, 1869, ClarP. C. 800 (Folder 3).

61. No. 25, Clarendon to Rumbold, 17 April 1869, No. 22, F.O. 539/9.

62. Argyll to Clarendon, undated April 1869, ClarP. C. 800 (Folder 3).

63. *Ibid.*

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*

boundary?' Hammond emphasised, 'There is no such thing.'<sup>66</sup> It was on this practical ground that the Oxus line was recommended in endorsement of the 'idea of Russia, that a river was a clearly defined boundary.'<sup>67</sup> Any Russian action south of that, it was maintained, would excite trouble in Afghan territory.<sup>68</sup> It is significant that the eventual occupation of Bukhara and Kokand by the Russians was implied in this suggestion. Further, the British proposal in no way involved a corresponding extension of Afghan territory. The trans-Oxus region beyond the Hindukush was recommended as a non-Afghan belt, an 'intermediary zone' enclosing neutralised Afghanistan. In clarifying the British point of view, Hammond made it quite clear that the inclusion of Kunduz and Balkh 'within the neutral zone' was 'out of the question'.<sup>69</sup> The proposal, however, betrayed a remarkable lack of insight into the contemporary social and political realities of Central Asia. There were areas, comprising primarily the eastern sector of the Oxus valley, where the two rival powers had overlapping jurisdiction and conflicting interests. The superimposition of a pattern of static political relationships on an area which was politically in a state of flux, depended for its success on a system of guarantees. In fact, the requirement of such a *sine-qua-non* condition was the paradox of the situation: its presence would have made the zone non-existent; its absence would have rendered it non-operative. It was only natural that the Russians should interpret the proposal of the Oxus line as the extension of the neutral zone up to the river<sup>70</sup> and a covert attack on Russia.<sup>71</sup>

Undoubtedly, Clarendon was sincere in his profession of good faith. The Government of India was directed not to overstep the limits of the policy developed by Lawrence in relation to Afghanistan and to

66. Hammond to Clarendon, 17 May 1869, ClarP. C. 500.

67. Argyll to Clarendon, undated April 1869, ClarP. C. 800 (Folder 3).

68. It was at this time that the Prussian Military attache at St. Petersburg was assured by the British Embassy that the vast country situated between the actual Russian territory and the Oxus would be a sufficiently large field of operation to exhaust the energy of the unquiet spirits on the Russian outposts and that such an action would not be viewed with suspicion in British. Rumbold to Clarendon, 19 May 1869, (No. 54, most confidential) No. 34 F.O. 539/9.

69. Hammond to Clarendon, 17 May 1869, ClarP. C. 503.

70. No. 23, Baron Brunnow to Gortchakoff, 5/7 April 1869, F.O. 539/9.

71. Hammond to Clarendon, 17 May 1869, ClarP. C. 501.

restrain Sher Ali from extending his dominions towards Balkh.<sup>72</sup> The realities of the situation, however, were to be discovered far away from the diplomatic formalities of London and St. Petersburg. The generals and administrators at Tashkent, faced with ferocious native resistance, read into Mayo's engagements in Afghanistan more energy and drive than the peaceful intentions of Clarendon had implied.<sup>73</sup> The interview with Sher Ali and the money granted to him were seen as a deliberate act on the part of the Indian government to inaugurate a system of antagonism against Russia.<sup>74</sup>

The Russians' anxiety was not altogether unwarranted. The Government of India had accepted the principle of a neutral zone provided it was not realised at the expense of what constituted in their view the Afghan Kingdom.<sup>75</sup> At Ambala, Mayo had encouraged Sher Ali to occupy the lost territories which had once belonged to his father.<sup>76</sup> It was essential to satisfy such territorial claims if a friendly and united Afghanistan was to form the nucleus of the cordon of independent but exclusively British-aligned states with which Mayo sought to form the bulwark of the Empire.<sup>77</sup> In this, he found considerable sympathy in some quarters in London. Rawlinson, for one, wrote to the Viceroy's complete agreement<sup>78</sup> that 'it is impossible to shut our eyes to the conviction that the Afghan territory bears the same relation to British India that the Bokharan territory bears to Russia, that both these states will in the process of time pass from the condition of allies to dependencies and will ultimately be incorporated in the respective dominions of the two great European powers which overshadow them'.<sup>79</sup> Thus, although there was no immediate question of geographical continuity, it would require much care and consideration, urged Rawlinson, to define the Afghan frontiers to the north and north-west. Such a definition, if recognised in London and

72. Argyll to Mayo, 19 February 1869, M.P. 47, No. 73 Argyll to Mayo, 4 June 1869, M.P. 47, No. 16.

73. Hammond to Clarendon, 17 May 1869, Clar P. C. 501.

74. *Ibid*; Forsyth to Burne, 6 August 1869, M.P. Vi; Hammond to Clarendon, 17 May 1869, ClarP. C. 503.

75. Mayo to Alison, 29 October 1871, M.P. 45, No. 4.

76. Mayo to Argyll, 2 March 1869, M.P. 34/1; No. 60; Durand to Mayo, 22 August 1869, M.P. 52/XII; Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 103.

77. 'Memorandum on Persia', Mayo, 29 December 1871, Arg P. Reel 312.

78. Mayo to Rawlinson, 15 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 159.

79. H.C. Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on the frontiers of Afghanistan', 15 June 1869, M.P. 5.

St. Petersburg, would, in all probability, have formed 'a permanent line of demarcation between the future empires of Great Britain and Russia in the East.'<sup>80</sup>

The definition of the frontier in those parts was a delicate problem, especially in view of the fluid political situation in Afghanistan. Balkh, ethnically more akin to Bukhara, was loosely connected with Kabul,<sup>81</sup> whose legal claims over the whole of the trans-Himalayan region were precarious, based as they were on the recent but temporary conquest of Dost Muhammad.<sup>82</sup> In the north, the political situation in the Oxus basin was in a state of flux and pockets of Uzbeg loyalty along the course of the river were watching closely the gradual crystallization of political loyalties in the Afghan and the Uzbeg worlds.<sup>83</sup> The problem was rendered even more complicated by the prevalent ideas on divided sovereignty and its general acceptability in the political vocabulary of Central Asia.<sup>84</sup> The traditional claims were necessarily to be 'compared with the existing status, when dealing with oriental claims of territory.'<sup>85</sup>

80. *Ibid.*

81. For the extent of Kabul authority over Afghan-Turkistan during the civil war, see, J. Talboys Wheeler, 'Memorandum on the frontiers of Afghan-Turkistan', Calcutta (1869), pp. 110-124, M.P.5. A short outline may, however, be given. The rebellion of Afzul Khan upon the death of Dost Muhammad was encouraged by Bukhara. In fact, the Bukharan Amir was himself contemplating a descent on Balkh and he was only deterred by an outbreak at Kokand. By the turn of the year 1869 Afzul proclaimed himself Amir. The short lived reconciliation between Sher and Afzul and the subsequent imprisonment of the latter was followed by another period of disaffection in Balkh and the entire army of Turkistan mutinied against the governor. By August 1865 Abdul Rahman became the master of Turkistan. When Afzul Khan became Amir of Kabul in 1866, Faiz Khan, the governor of Balkh declared for Sher Ali. When Afzul died and Azim succeeded, Balkh was still loosely connected with Sher Ali. Finally, when Sher Ali reoccupied Kabul, Balkh and the rest of the Afghan Turkistan declared for Abdul Rahman.

82. Memo enclosed with 312 A, India, 7 July 1869, FLI/15.

83. The chiefs of Siripul, Shibargham, Ackcha, Maimena and Kunduz transferred their allegiance time and again to Bukhara. In fact, it was Russian aggression from the North, which precluded the Bukharan ruler from giving more active support to his cause in the cis-Oxus politics. Cf. Wheeler, 'Memorandum on Afghan-Turkistan', *op. cit.*, pp. 111, 117, 120 and 121.

84. The cases of Kunduz, Maimena and Badakshan stand out prominently in this category. *Ibid.*, pp. 111, 120 and 125.

85. J.T. Wheeler, 'Note on Mr. T. Saundar's remark on Afghan-Turkistan Map and Memorandum', 20 December 1870, M.P. 5.

Besides, it was still a debatable point—and this the Russians seemed determined to contest—whether expatriation was really the normal condition of political society in Central Asia.<sup>86</sup> Accordingly, there was considerable pressure to take exception to the fixity of tenure of a government because there were pretenders or refugees in other countries.<sup>87</sup> Besides, there was a serious obstacle in the paucity of geographical and topographical knowledge. Much of what was available consisted of confused hearsay and the even more confused evidence of travel literature.<sup>88</sup>

86. H.C. Rawlinson, 'Presidential Address', *R.R.G.S.*, Vol. XVIII, 1872-73.
87. For example, there was a refugee chief from Badakshan territory who threatened reprisals. The eldest sons of Sher Ali's brothers, which brothers were previously in command of the country of Afghanistan, were both refugees and pretenders to the throne. The eldest son of the King of Bukhara was a refugee with the Atalik Ghazee at Kashgar.
88. A study of the type of sources available to Mayo and his Government may be made. Prior to 1750 only one European traveller appears to have reached Bukhara, namely Anthony Jenkison, who was sent from Moscow by the Muscovy Company in 1557. But as regards the countries between the Hindukush and the Oxus, Jenkison knew nothing. In 1783-84, Foster of the Bengal Civil Service proceeded in disguise from Kandahar via Herat to the southern shore of the Caspian, but he appears to have left the territories in question altogether to the eastward. Sir John Malcolm was sent on a mission to Persia in 1801 and again in 1810 but he mentioned nothing of the frontier of Balkh. Elphinstone was sent on a mission to Kabul in 1808-9, and his account of the 'Kingdom of Cabul' is replete with authentic information and formed the most important source of Wheeler's report on Afghan-Turkistan and its frontiers. Moorcroft's journals on his mission to Kunduz contained no information as to the geography of the Oxus. Conolly's journey to Central Asia in 1829 followed a route from Meshed to Herat and hence the territory of Balkh was beyond the scope of his investigations. When Sir A. Burnes visited the neighbourhood of Balkh in 1833 the Oxus could scarcely be regarded as the boundary for Balkh and Akcha were the dependencies of Bukhara. The same political status appears to have existed in 1840 when Capt. Conolly visited Maimena. In 1845 General Ferrier proceeded from Herat via Maimena to Balkh and Khulm and still there seemed to have been no alteration in the status. The only authority since the Afghan 'reconquest' of Balkh in 1850 available to Mayo was Arminius Vambery who travelled in Central Asia in the year 1863. Dwelling on the frontier of Afghanistan, between Bukhara and Balkh, Vambery wrote that in early and difficult times, the sovereign of Bukhara had other possessions on the other side of the river Oxus, but he was deprived of them by Dost Muhammad, and, during the days of Vambery, Bukhara retained nothing except Charjoi and Kerki. This was obviously the basis of Wheeler's geography. J.T. Wheeler, 'Memorandum on Afghan Turkistan', *M.P.* 5, pp. 141-47.

Despite these handicaps, Mayo acted with remarkable consistency in his search for a convenient frontier. Early in April 1869 he upheld the Amir's claim to Balkh as legitimate.<sup>89</sup> The diplomacy of the Foreign Office, at that time, was influenced by Philips' map of Persia. Evidently, the map was faithful to the realities of Kabul authority during the period of the civil war.<sup>90</sup> Mayo found it inconsistent with his policy. His repudiation of Philips' authority was final.<sup>91</sup> In May, the Russians showed a willingness to accept a map by Wheeler marking the range of the Indian Caucasus (i.e. Hindukush) from Badakshan to Murghab as being the confines of Afghanistan.<sup>92</sup> Mayo insisted that such a frontier was based on the situation preceding the conquest of Dost Muhammad.<sup>93</sup> By mid-June 1869, Mayo had made a rough catalogue of the claims of Sher Ali which he was inclined to back.<sup>94</sup> It was upheld that Sher Ali was already in possession of Turkistan and Badakshan resulting from a bloody revolution which had extended his dominions up to the Oxus, 'and some say, beyond it', although Mayo confessed that there was as yet 'no evidence at hand as regards the extent of it'.<sup>95</sup> On the status of Maimena, Mayo thought that little doubt existed of its being in Afghanistan, its chiefs having professed in an earlier period allegiance to the rulers of Kabul and of Herat.<sup>96</sup> Here Mayo's authority was Thornton's Gazette of 1844, which in turn depended for its information on the authority of the Journal of the Asiatic Society of an even earlier date and on Connolly's Travels.<sup>97</sup> With regard to the country lying between Maimena and Herat which included the valley of Murghab, Mayo could furnish no evidence to

89. Mayo to Argyll, 12 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 40.

90. J. Talboys Wheeler, 'Memorandum on Afghan Turkistan', M.P. 5, pp. 112-113.

91. 213A, India, 7 July 1869, SIM 51, p. 71.

92. Another Wheeler, the official geographer of the India Office had come, working independently of his Indian namesake, to the same conclusion. So striking was the resemblance between the two maps that Mayo wrote, 'It must have been stolen from the Calcutta Foreign Office, for Wheeler prepared only one map.' Mayo to Rawlinson, 30 June 1870, M.P. 35/2, No. 134.

93. *Ibid.*

94. Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 103; Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 138.

95. *Ibid.*

96. *Ibid.*

97: Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 103.

substantiate the Afghan claims. Accordingly, he favoured the postponement of any territorial adjustment over it until there had been a more favourable development of Afghan powers at Balkh and the rest of Afghan Turkistan.<sup>98</sup> Such was also the argument of the official despatch on the subject.<sup>99</sup> In his private communication with Rawlinson, Mayo expressed his complete agreement with the latter's recommendation<sup>100</sup> on the frontier, with the exception that Rawlinson's line went nearer 'to Kerki than ours.'<sup>101</sup> In his official despatch, however, Mayo was still reluctant to present any precise definition of the northern frontier of Afghanistan.<sup>102</sup> Nor did Wakhan find any place in his scheme of things. Evidently, in the absence of more conclusive evidence, Mayo sought a general understanding with Russia over the maintenance of the *status quo* in the Oxus region as a preliminary to its ultimate incorporation into Afghanistan.<sup>103</sup> There were, however, at least from the Indian point of view, no immediate prospects of coming to any understanding with Russia on the subject of the Afghan frontier. It was, therefore, decided to make the best of the situation by preparing and publishing an outline map of Afghanistan as a corrective to Philips' 'Persia' in order to enable the public to be familiar 'with the practical fact that the Oxus was the boundary of the Afghan kingdom.'<sup>104</sup> It was also felt

98. *Ibid.*

99. 213A, India, 7 July 1869, SIM 51, p. 71; it was passed on to Buchanan on 14 September 1869, F.O. 65/870. The Indian despatch held that Afghanistan possessed the whole tract of country up to the Oxus and the only doubtful province was the friendly and loyal state of Maimena, 'although independent of Afghanistan so far as payment of tribute is concerned.' Alder suggests that the Indian despatch was based on the recommendations of Rawlinson. Alder 'British India's frontier etc.', *op. cit.*, p. 108. Rawlinson's memo. however, reached the Indian Foreign office on 15 July 1869. See the original copy in M.P. 5. It is evident, however, that the Indian government had already come to a definite conclusion about the frontier, Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 103.

100. Rawlinson's definition ran as follows: 'The most convenient line of decision that could be adopted between the Afghan provinces and the Uzbeg territory to the northward would be to follow the main stream of the Oxus from Sirikul Lake (cf. Wood) on the Pamir plateau to the Kerki ferry on the 6th meridian to the East longitude...' Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on the frontiers of Afghanistan', M.P. 5.

101. Mayo to Rawlinson, 15 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 159,

102. 213A, India, 7 July 1869, SIM 51, p. 71.

103. Hammond to Clarendon, 17 May 1869, CranP. C. 503.

104. H.C. Rawlinson to Mayo, 18 June 1869, M.P. 5.

desirable to alter the misleading title of Turkistan, the name given to the cis-Oxus territory, to a more accurate one, for it was liable to be confused in the popular mind with Russian or Chinese Turkistan.<sup>105</sup>

A general reference here to Russian diplomacy may not be out of place. Prince Gortchakoff had opened the dialogue on an ominous note. His famous Circular stood as a manifesto of Russian objectives in Central Asia. It implied the incorporation of the territory on the left bank of the river Syr Daria, which was bound to draw the diplomatic intervention of the European powers, especially the British. They might have argued that Russia did not need to expand now that she found herself face to face with a social centre such as the Khanates of Kokand and Bukhara presented in a more substantial condition, with a more concentrated population, less unsettled and better organised than that on her previous frontier.<sup>106</sup> The object of the Prince was to divert the attention of the European powers interested in free passage along the Syr Daria and to treat its incorporation into the Empire as an all but accomplished fact. This appeared to be done first by raising the issue of the impracticability of a neutral zone in Central Asia, thereby retaining a free hand in dealing with the Khanates bordering on her Empire, and secondly by raising substantial doubts as to the boundaries between Afghanistan and Bukhara, the former being recognised as under British influence, while the military occupation of parts of Bukharan territory gave Russia a powerful claim on that state.<sup>107</sup>

The Government of India did not overlook the trend of Russian diplomacy and its despatch of July 1869<sup>108</sup> aimed at neutralising the attempted exclusion of British commercial interests from Bukhara and Kokand. The Foreign Office, however, was entrapped in Gortchakoff's snare, and the Prince hastened to grasp an additional bargain which Clarendon's obsession with a 'neutral zone' had offered him. A breakdown in negotiations on this account, however, was not considered good diplomacy. Russia was far from secure in

105. *Ibid.*

106. J. Michell, 'Memorandum on the present state of the Correspondence with Russia on the subject of Central Asia', 20 January 1873, Enclosure in No. 401, F.O. 539/9.

107. Trelaway Saunders, 'The Boundary of Afghan-Turkistan', 10 January 1873, Annex to No. 1, F.O. 539/10.

108. 213A, India, 7 July 1869, SIM 51, p. 71.

Central Asia. In view of the 'volcanic' condition of Central Asia, Gortchakoff could not afford to let the opportunity of retaining British sympathy pass by.<sup>109</sup> Naturally, concessions followed in rapid succession. First, Gortchakoff offered to include within Afghanistan all the territories marked yellow in Philips' Persia.<sup>110</sup> Russia was no longer interested, the Prince added, in whether Afghanistan was called an independent, intermediary or neutral zone. For all practical purposes, to the Russians it meant one and the same thing because a neutral zone of the Belgian variety was regarded as preposterous in the context of Central Asia.<sup>111</sup> Besides, Gortchakoff would no longer insist on the continuation by the British of Lawrence's policy towards Afghanistan. He would be satisfied, the Prince argued, if Sher Ali was restrained from inaugurating offensives against Russian interests.<sup>112</sup> By August 1869 the Russians had conceded that the neutral zone sought by Clarendon should be confined to the mountainous regions enclosing Afghanistan, and if the Amir of Kabul gave her trouble she would fight him on the territory between the Oxus and the mountains and let him alone when he retired within them.<sup>113</sup> This informal understanding was given a more formal shape by the Clarendon-Gortchakoff convention at Heidelberg in the following autumn.<sup>114</sup>

Central Asia was the principal item of discussion at Heidelberg. Both statesmen agreed on the necessity of arriving at a clear

109. Buchanan to Clarendon, 28 July 1869, No. 45, F.O. 539/9. For Russian embarrassments against Khiva, complications in Kokand, and the uprising of the 'Sharts' against the Russian protege, Kundayar Khan of Kokand, see E. Schuyler, 'Turkistan etc.', *op. cit.*

110. Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 14/16 April 1869, No. 25, F.O. 539/9.

111. *Ibid.*

112. *Ibid.*

113. Buchanan to Clarendon, 12 August 1876, ClarP. C. 482.

114. Not much importance has been paid to this meeting at Heidelberg by historians. Alder makes no mention of it in his study. (Alder, 'India Frontier etc.', *op. cit.*, ch. 4/1) Thornton feels that the question was dealt in Heidelberg as 'an exercise in diplomacy' and both the statesmen parted after a 'drawn bout'. (Thornton, 'Afghanistan and the Anglo-Russian diplomacy', *op. cit.*, pp. 212-3). Habberton concludes that the 'neutral zone' as the central theme of the discussion was dropped at the present meeting. (Habberton, 'Anglo-Russians etc.', *op. cit.*, p. 25). It may be noted, however, that Clarendon himself considered the discussion, especially on Central Asia, 'a great success'. Clarendon to Gladstone, 4 Sept. 1869, ClarP. C. 501.

understanding to determine the basis of a neutral territory between the possessions of the two powers. When they had agreed on the principle, Clarendon alluded to the Oxus as forming the most desirable line of demarcation for a neutral ground. Gortchakoff's rejection of the proposal was unequivocal. Clarendon was told not to press the point as a portion of the country south of the Oxus was then claimed by Bukhara, and, as an alternative, to consider Afghanistan as constituting the neutral zone which it was expedient to establish. Clarendon's rejection of the counter proposal, if he did reject it, is not recorded in his official report.<sup>115</sup> It is true that, on further deliberation, Clarendon persuaded the Prince to agree to Sher Ali's right to rectify his frontiers at the expense of what Russia considered the 'Independent Khanates of the north', provided the Afghan ruler did not pursue a policy that might reasonably be considered aggressive against Russia. Such an arrangement was obviously not meant to extend the Afghan frontier to the Oxus. Hammond had already made it clear that no project of such a nature was being contemplated, nor would it ever be entertained.<sup>116</sup> Thus, a belt of neutral zone was still expected to be realised between the rectified frontiers of Afghanistan and Bukhara.<sup>117</sup> In fact, Mayo's recommendation concerning the claims of Sher Ali was never seriously entertained by the Home authorities. Argyll, Granville<sup>118</sup> and Gladstone time and again doubted the wisdom of such 'exaggerated' claims.<sup>119</sup> Clarendon, the most practical of them, explained the British position to Gortchakoff with the help of a map which, despite Mayo's remonstrance, still showed the whole of the

115. Clarendon recorded such matters of importance as were discussed in the form of a despatch. The original draft of the despatch is kept with the Clarendon Papers, C. 501. The same in print is Clarendon to Buchanan, 3 September 1869, No. 52, F.O. 539/9.

116. Hammond to Clarendon, 17 May 1869, ClarP. C. 503.

117. For the official remonstrance by Mayo against Clarendon's failure to defend the Oxus line and his concession to Bukharan claims on the left bank of the river, see 'The Governor-General in Council to The Duke of Argyll', 18 October 1869, Enclosure in No. 83, F.O. 539/9.

118. Granville, George Leveson-Gower, 2nd Earl Granville (1815-91); Foreign minister, 1851-2, 1870-4, 1880-5.

119. For example, see Argyll to Clarendon, 15 November 1869, ClarP. C. 500 (folder 3); Argyll to Granville, (undated) January 1872, GranP. 25/51; Granville to Argyll, 20 January 1872, GranP. 51.

cis-Oxus territory as independent of Kabul and somewhat loosely connected with Khiva.<sup>120</sup>

Meanwhile, as the Foreign Office's appreciation of the Indian case was not forthcoming, Mayo had taken steps to execute his own diplomacy by-passing the careful scrutiny of the Home government. Accordingly, T. D. Forsyth, an Indian official who had acquired a considerable reputation as an exponent of Central Asian politics, was encouraged to proceed to St. Petersburg as the Viceroy's emissary.<sup>121</sup> The attitude of the Home authorities towards the proposed mission was characteristic of their approach to the Central Asian problem. The India Office, for instance, was somewhat unfavourably disposed towards Mayo's diplomatic manoeuvres.<sup>122</sup> Thus, on first arriving in Britain, Forsyth found his chances of getting to Russia exceedingly small.<sup>123</sup> The Duke of Argyll told him that he had no intention of taking any steps to ascertain what the Russians were doing in Central Asia. Forsyth was, in fact, given to understand that the Duke was opposed to his going to Russia.<sup>124</sup> The Foreign Secretary was more pliable, especially with regard to Forsyth's view of Yarkand, and the wider issues of commerce.<sup>125</sup> Yet, there was considerable hesitation and all seemed to depend on the attitude of Baron Brunnow.<sup>126</sup> It was indeed the extraordinary interest shown by the Russians which saved the mission from falling

120. In defence of his assertion that the idea of 'neutral zone' was dropped at Heidelberg, Habberton refers to a letter from Granville to Gladstone, 30 September 1873 as quoted in B.E. Fitzmaurice, '*Life of Second Earl Granville*', London, 1905, Vol. 1, pp. 143-4. See Habberton, 'Anglo-Afghan Relations etc.', *op. cit.*, p. 25. It is interesting to note what Granville thought of the results of the negotiations in 1878. Upon an enquiry from Gladstone on this point, he wrote, 'The neutral zone was recommended in the spring of 1869 between the possessions of England and Russia. The negotiations over its limits continued and was the core of the negotiation until 1871 when the limits of Afghanistan approved by the Indian Govt. were clearly laid down by a despatch to Ld. A. Loftus. The idea of the neutral zone was abandoned by the English proposal.' Agatha Ramm (ed.), '*Political Correspondence of Mr. Gladstone and Ld. Granville, 1876-86*', London, 1952, vol I, p. 125.

121. Mayo to Argyll, 3 May 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 54. 'Minutes by the Viceroy, 27 April 1869, M.P. 9.'

122. Forsyth to Burne, 12 July 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

123. Forsyth to Mayo, 25 June 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

124. Forsyth to Burne, 12 July 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

125. Forsyth to Mayo, 16 July 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

126. Forsyth to Mayo, 25 June 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

through.<sup>127</sup> By August, Forsyth found himself attached to the Foreign Office and an arrangement was made to give some kind of official turn to the conversation he was to have with the Russians.<sup>128</sup> But little instruction of any significance was given to him from London.<sup>129</sup> It was assumed that Forsyth had no political charge and now that Clarendon had entered into discussion with Gortchakoff on Central Asia, the mission was necessitated by Gortchakoff's wish to go more deeply into the commercial side of the question.<sup>130</sup>

The rationalisation of Central Asian trade, which was to be Forsyth's prime concern, yielded hardly any positive result<sup>131</sup> and Forsyth soon got himself involved with the wider issues of Central Asian policy and the Afghan frontier.<sup>132</sup> It appears from the report of his mission that Forsyth's intention was to offset inconveniences of the 'zone neutral' by introducing a competitive principle in the course of the negotiations.<sup>133</sup> This he sought to effect by a careful manipulation of a formula which was agreed upon to govern the possessions of Sher Ali. Throughout the negotiations, the Russians stood by the understanding reached at Heidelberg. It was in accordance with it that Stremoukoff explained the idea of a neutral zone which would include such tracts as Balkh, Kunduz and Badakshan and agreed to restrain Bukhara from transgressing her

127. *Ibid.*

128. Forsyth to Mayo, 5 November 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

129. Forsyth to Mayo, 11 August 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

130. Forsyth to Mayo, 17 September 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

131. All through the negotiation the Russians regarded the tariff matters as secondary in importance to a political understanding. Stremoukoff confessed to Buchanan that as Russia hoped to be able to procure cotton and silk in Central Asia in exchange for her manufactures she could not be expected to encourage other countries to bring rival goods into the market. Buchanan to Clarendon, 5 October 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869. Same to same, 6 November 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869. Also see Forsyth to Mayo, 5 August 1869, M.P. 9 VIa.

132. 'Forsyth had no official instructions', Buchanan wrote, 'I have none beyond your instructions to Rumbold to propose the Oxus as the boundary and your verbal direction to maintain Sher Ali's right to hold all his father's possessions. What is done is however in strict conformity with Lord Mayo's views as expressed in a private letter to me'. Buchanan to Clarendon, 6 November 1869, M.P. In letter : 1869.

133. Forsyth to Buchanan, 2 November 1869, Enclosure in No. 71. Buchanan to Clarendon, 2 November 1869, F.O. 539/9, No. 222; Forsyth to Buchanan, 5 November 1869, No. 234, F.O. 530/9.

frontier towards Afghanistan.<sup>134</sup> Moreover, in conformity with the agreement on a reasonable rectification of the Afghan frontier, they consented to the principle that Afghanistan ought to consist of all the provinces which Sher Ali then held.<sup>135</sup> When Forsyth pointed out that Balkh and Kunduz had become incorporated with Afghanistan, the Russian minister consented to agree to the *status quo*. But as regards Badakshan, Stremoukoff was adamant and insisted that its incorporation into the list of Sher Ali's claims could not be allowed.<sup>136</sup> Under such circumstances, Forsyth's interpretation that the Russians consented to consider Badakshan as forming part of Afghanistan and the Oxus as defining her northern frontier<sup>137</sup> may only be understood as an attempt to entrap the Russians in diplomatic ambiguity.<sup>138</sup> It is obvious that Forsyth, a district

134. Forsyth to Buchanan, 2 November 1869, Enclosure in No. 71. Buchanan to Clarendon, 2 November 1869, F.O. 539/9, No. 222; Forsyth to Buchanan, 5 November 1869, No. 234, F.O. 539/9.

135. *Ibid.*

136. The relevant section of this report may be quoted : 'M. Stremoukoff very ably explained the idea of a neutral zone, which would include such tracts as Balkh and Kunduz and Badakshan (*sic*) but seeing that these provinces have become, for periods more or less long incorporated with Afghanistan, it was the opinion of General Miliutine concurred by M. Stremoukoff, that we should accept as Afghanistan all the provinces which Sher Ali now holds.' Buchanan, however, wrote in the covering letter to Clarendon : 'The only amendments which M. Stremoukoff requested might be made in it had reference to Badakshan which he does not believe to be in possession of Sher Ali and which he objects to his holding on account of its vicinity to Kokand...' Buchanan to Clarendon, 2 November 1869, No. 222; No. 71, F.O. 539/9.

137. T.D. Forsyth, 'Epitome of events in Afghanistan since Dost Muhammad's death', January 1870, p. 16, M.P. 5. Cf. E. Forsyth (ed.), '*Autobiography and Reminiscences of Sir Douglas Forsyth*', London, pp. 49-50. See also Forsyth to Mayo, 5 November 1869, M.P. 9 Vla.

138. Alder finds no evidence to doubt the sincerity of Forsyth's firm conviction in what he thought to have passed between himself and the Russians. See Alder, '*India's frontier etc.*', *op. cit.*, p. 169. His authority on this account is Forsyth's interpretation in his own autobiography. It is true that Buchanan wrote in his private letter that if the English facts were correct as to Badakshan having acknowledged Sher Ali's authority, the Russians would have got into a fix. Buchanan to Clarendon, 2 November 1869, B.P., Out letter : 1869, quoted in Alder, '*India's frontier etc.*', *op. cit.* p. 169. But Alder overlooks the amendments made to the report by Stremoukoff and for all practical purposes such an amendment has to be taken as a corrective to Forsyth's misunderstanding or, perhaps, misrepresentation of the engagement.

officer, commissioned under a subordinate administration and on a semi-official visit, had no authority to supersede the fundamentals of an agreement arrived at by the supreme government. On Buchanan's own admission, Forsyth had no success, even in establishing that the Oxus should form the boundary of Balkh.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, it was Forsyth's interpretation of the engagement which was to determine the attitude of the British Foreign Office in the subsequent discussions.

British diplomacy, after the mission of Forsyth, was concerned with one purpose—to come to a formal understanding with Russia that the Oxus line should mark the frontier of Russian activity and, if possible, of Afghanistan, provided that the Russians could be induced to drop the idea of a neutral zone. The British hoped to exploit the possibility of embarrassing the Russians in Central Asia to achieve this objective. It was considered expedient, for example, to force the issue before the Russians could put their house in order and to make capital of their desperate situation in Khiva in order to strike a bargain on Badakshan.<sup>140</sup> The question became all the more pressing as the effective authority of the Afghans and the Uzbeks came together<sup>111</sup> to threaten the uneasy peace of the Upper Oxus,<sup>142</sup> nourished by the uncertainties of a floating frontier and conflicting traditional claims.

With such considerations and calculations working beneath the surface, the ascendancy of Forsyth's interpretation of the engagement is understandable.<sup>143</sup> The Russians reacted to the British shift of

139. Buchanan to Mayo, 4 January 1872, B.P., Out letter : 1872.

140. Loftus to Granville, 16 October 1872, P.P. 1873, LXXV, C. 704, p. 38.  
295, Loftus to Granville, 16 October 1872, F.O. 65/874; Loftus to Granville, 7 March 1872, GranP. 91.

141. For the consolidation of Bukharan authority on the right bank of the river Oxus, see 'Report from F.B. November 11, 1869', Enclosure 3 in No. 125, Grant Duff to Hammond, 1 March 1870, F.O. 539/9.

142. For details see *ibid.*

143. It may be instructive to quote the views of the British ministers on the discrepancy between what was desired and what was permissible under the framework of the existing engagements. 'In the understanding came through Forsyth in Clarendon's time with Russia, we referred to the present possession of Afghanistan (*sic*). I have no doubt whatever that the Oxus is the boundary which it would be most expedient to establish. But I have some doubts how far the Amir is in actual possession of Afghanistan'. Argyll to Granville, 4 June 1872, GranP. 51. To the

position by adopting dilatory tactics to gain time and to keep the question of the Upper Oxus open and unfettered by diplomatic arrangement, and to reserve its resolution for more favourable circumstances.<sup>144</sup> The failure of the Russians to comply with the promised note on Afghan Turkistan only confirmed such an apprehension.<sup>145</sup>

The initiative to break through Russian defensive diplomacy came from Buchanan. Early in 1870, he had suggested that the Indian government should set out its views as to the territory to which Sher Ali had an undoubted claim and then invite the assent of the Russian government. If this was not forthcoming, they would at least have to state in terms 'which would admit of no evasion' the limit of the territory which Sher Ali 'would have the right to defend.'<sup>146</sup> The Foreign Office having adopted the suggestion, Mayo prepared a despatch<sup>147</sup> restating the Afghan case and it was duly forwarded to the Russian government for its observations.

It should not be presumed that the government of Mayo had at its disposal the complete knowledge, which only subsequent investigations made available, of the circumstances, geographical and political, of the Upper Oxus region.<sup>158</sup> The resultant inconvenience

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above the Foreign Secretary replied : 'We have urged the Russians to remain faithful to Forsyth's arrangement. It appears more than doubtful whether that arrangement and what we require are the same thing.'

Granville to Argyll, 6 January 1872, GranP. 51.

144. Loftus to Granville, 7 March 1872, GranP. 91.

145. For the reasons for Kaufmann's delay in sending his promised report, see 295, Loftus to Granville, 16 October 1872, F.O. 55/874; Buchanan to Mayo, 28 June 1870, B.P. Out letter : 1870 ; 'Memorandum by Mr. Michell on the present state of Correspondence with Russia on the subject of Central Asia.' 20 January 1873, Enclosure in No. 1, F.O. 539/9.

146. 63, Buchanan to Granville, 21 February 1870, F.O. 539/9.

147. 27, India, 20 May 1870, P.P. LXXV., C. 704, p. 45.

148. On the question of the information at the disposal of the Indian government in 1870, when Lord Mayo's letter was written with regard to the geography of the district on the Upper Oxus, it need scarcely be pointed out that it was Forsyth's second mission to Yarkand in 1873, not his first one in 1870, which brought really valuable information in regard to the Pamirs and to Badakshan and Shignan. Faiz Baksh's journey via Badakshan and Wakhan to Yarkand was made in 1870, but his report was first printed in 1871. (see the same in 'Papers connected with Upper Oxus region', J.R.G.S., Vol. XLII, London, 1872). In fact, it was only

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officer, commissioned under a subordinate administration and on a semi-official visit, had no authority to supersede the fundamentals of an agreement arrived at by the supreme government. On Buchanan's own admission, Forsyth had no success, even in establishing that the Oxus should form the boundary of Balkh.<sup>139</sup> Nevertheless, it was Forsyth's interpretation of the engagement which was to determine the attitude of the British Foreign Office in the subsequent discussions.

British diplomacy, after the mission of Forsyth, was concerned with one purpose—to come to a formal understanding with Russia that the Oxus line should mark the frontier of Russian activity and, if possible, of Afghanistan, provided that the Russians could be induced to drop the idea of a neutral zone. The British hoped to exploit the possibility of embarrassing the Russians in Central Asia to achieve this objective. It was considered expedient, for example, to force the issue before the Russians could put their house in order and to make capital of their desperate situation in Khiva in order to strike a bargain on Badakshan.<sup>140</sup> The question became all the more pressing as the effective authority of the Afghans and the Uzbeks came together<sup>141</sup> to threaten the uneasy peace of the Upper Oxus,<sup>142</sup> nourished by the uncertainties of a floating frontier and conflicting traditional claims.

With such considerations and calculations working beneath the surface, the ascendancy of Forsyth's interpretation of the engagement is understandable.<sup>143</sup> The Russians reacted to the British shift of

139. Buchanan to Mayo, 4 January 1872, B.P., Out letter: 1872.

140. Loftus to Granville, 16 October 1872, P.P. 1873, LXXV, C. 704, p. 38.

295, Loftus to Granville, 16 October 1872, F.O. 65/874; Loftus to Granville, 7 March 1872, GranP. 91.

141. For the consolidation of Bukharan authority on the right bank of the river Oxus, see 'Report from F.B. November 11, 1869', Enclosure 3 in No. 125, Grant Duff to Hammond, 1 March 1870, F.O. 539/9.

142. For details see *ibid.*

143. It may be instructive to quote the views of the British ministers on the discrepancy between what was desired and what was permissible under the framework of the existing engagements. 'In the understanding came through Forsyth in Clarendon's time with Russia, we referred to the present possession of Afghanistan (*sic*). I have no doubt whatever that the Oxus is the boundary which it would be most expedient to establish. But I have some doubts how far the Amir is in actual possession of Afghanistan'. Argyll to Granville, 4 June 1872, GranP. 51. To the

position by adopting dilatory tactics to gain time and to keep the question of the Upper Oxus open and unfettered by diplomatic arrangement, and to reserve its resolution for more favourable circumstances.<sup>144</sup> The failure of the Russians to comply with the promised note on Afghan Turkistan only confirmed such an apprehension.<sup>145</sup>

The initiative to break through Russian defensive diplomacy came from Buchanan. Early in 1870, he had suggested that the Indian government should set out its views as to the territory to which Sher Ali had an undoubted claim and then invite the assent of the Russian government. If this was not forthcoming, they would at least have to state in terms 'which would admit of no evasion' the limit of the territory which Sher Ali 'would have the right to defend.'<sup>146</sup> The Foreign Office having adopted the suggestion, Mayo prepared a despatch<sup>147</sup> restating the Afghan case and it was duly forwarded to the Russian government for its observations.

It should not be presumed that the government of Mayo had at its disposal the complete knowledge, which only subsequent investigations made available, of the circumstances, geographical and political, of the Upper Oxus region.<sup>158</sup> The resultant inconvenience

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above the Foreign Secretary replied : 'We have urged the Russians to remain faithful to Forsyth's arrangement. It appears more than doubtful whether that arrangement and what we require are the same thing.'

Granville to Argyll, 6 January 1872, GranP. 51.

144. Loftus to Granville, 7 March 1872, GranP. 91.

145. For the reasons for Kaufmann's delay in sending his promised report, see 295, Loftus to Granville, 16 October 1872, F.O. 55/874; Buchanan to Mayo, 28 June 1870, B.P. Out letter : 1870 ; 'Memorandum by Mr. Michell on the present state of Correspondence with Russia on the subject of Central Asia.' 20 January 1873, Enclosure in No. 1, F.O. 539/9.

146. 63, Buchanan to Granville, 21 February 1870, F.O. 539/9.

147. 27, India, 20 May 1870, P.P. LXXV., C. 704, p. 45.

148. On the question of the information at the disposal of the Indian government in 1870, when Lord Mayo's letter was written with regard to the geography of the district on the Upper Oxus, it need scarcely be pointed out that it was Forsyth's second mission to Yarkand in 1873, not his first one in 1870, which brought really valuable information in regard to the Pamirs and to Badakshan and Shignan. Faiz Baksh's journey via Badakshan and Wakhan to Yarkand was made in 1870, but his report was first printed in 1871. (see the same in 'Papers connected with Upper Oxus region', J.R.G.S., Vol. XLII, London, 1872). In fact, it was only (see next page)

was, however, largely neutralised by the knowledge of the defined interests of the two contracting parties, which were superimposed on the conflicting claims of the local powers directly concerned. It was, indeed, a question of arriving at a fixed frontier mutually agreed upon and an understanding to maintain the native rulers in the outlying areas. The claims of Afghanistan and of Badakshan, championed by Mayo and Kaufmann respectively, reflected, in reality, the interests of Calcutta and Tashkent, tempered only by the expediency of getting their respective proteges reconciled to the bargain which would thus be struck. Early in 1869, Rawlinson had defined the interests that the British ought to defend.<sup>149</sup> But even on the basis of the information available, the frontier recommended by Rawlinson did not correspond strictly to Afghan and Uzbeg claims. The district of Kolab, which had sometimes been attached to Badakshan, was excluded from the Afghan limits.<sup>150</sup> Maimena, the most powerful of a cluster of small Uzbeg principalities, was considered the key to Herat from the North. It was for this reason alone that it should be regarded as a political dependency of Herat.<sup>151</sup> The extension of Afghan rule up to Lake Sirikul was obviously a concession to the pressure of commercial interests, which clamoured

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during the first three years of the 1870s that the results of the explorations of the native observers were collated. See the following : (a) 'The report of Mirza's journey to Badakshan and Wakhan', J.R.G.S., XLI (1871), p. 132. (b) 'Pundit Manphul's report on Badakshan,' J.R.G.S., XLXI, London, 1872. (c) 'Havildar's report of the journey through Chitral to Faizabad', *ibid.* In fact Col. Yule wrote so late as 1872 as follows with regard to the geography of the Oxus : 'The Punja in running northward quits the field of our actual knowledge for a space of something like 170 miles. We know that it traverses the valley states of Shignan and Roshan, acknowledging the supremacy of Badakshan and then the independent state of Darwaz... Of neither Roshan nor of the rugged and inaccessible Darwaz, do we know any particulars.' Col. Yule, '*Essay on the Geography of the Valley of Oxus*', prefixed to the 1872 edition of J. Wood, "*Report of a Journey to the sources of the Amu Daria (Oxus)*", London, 1872. Compare the views of Gortchakoff regarding the uncertainties of the geography of the Oxus valley in Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 18 December 1871, P.P. LXXV. C. 704. Also Rawlinson, '*England and Russia etc.*', *op. cit.*, p. 310.

149. Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on the frontier of Afghanistan', 18 June 1869, M.P. 35.

150. *Ibid.*

151. *Ibid.*

for the inclusion of the whole of the Upper Oxus including Wakhan, Darwaz, Karategin and Kolab and 'perhaps small territories not embraced in those districts'<sup>152</sup> within the Afghan zone dependent on Badakshan. But as late as December 1869 Wheeler had discovered 'no evidence whatever that Afghan supremacy had ever extended over Wakhan, much less to the Pamir Steppe'.<sup>153</sup> While acknowledging the commercial interests of the valley of the Oxus and the Pamir Steppe, Wheeler had quite rightly wondered whether those interests would not suffer severely from any attempt which might be made to push the Afghan frontier unduly to the north-east.<sup>154</sup> Accordingly, Mayo's despatch set the boundary not along the 'mainstream' which issued from Lake Syr but along a southern effluent descending from the snowy summits of the Hindu Kush.<sup>155</sup>

In defending these interests in terms of Afghan claims, the British despatch made no allusion to a neutral zone as forming an essential feature of the existing diplomatic arrangement between Britain and Russia. The problem at this stage of the negotiations, according to the Government of India, was merely one of defining the Afghan frontier along the Oxus, the principle of delineation having already been arrived at during Forsyth's mission.<sup>156</sup> The arguments of the present despatch, however, were more conclusive than the memo of 1869,<sup>157</sup> which had contained little historical detail in support of the Afghan claims to the northern provinces, the legal basis of which depended exclusively on the Dost's 'annexation'.<sup>158</sup> 'I should have wished', Kaye had insisted, hoping to circumvent Russian opposition to such a claim, 'that the memorandum you sent us had shown not that Dost Mohamed "annexed" these territories, but that

152. T. Saunders. 'Remarks on the Map and Memorandum relating to Afghan-Turkistan by J. Talboys Wheeler', 10 November 1869, M.P. 5.

153. J.T. Wheeler, 'Note on Mr. Saunders' remarks on Afghan-Turkistan Map and Memorandum', 20 December 1869, M.P. 5.

154. *Ibid.*

155. The precise definition of the eastern sector of the Oxus frontier was to follow: 'the stream which passes Wakhan upto the point where the ranges of Hindu Kush meet the southern angle of the Pamir steppe.' 27, India, 20 May 1870, P.P. LXXV, C.704, pp. 44.

156. *Ibid.*; see also No. 254 (Most Confidential), Buchanan to Granville, 24 October 1871, No. 253, F.O. 539/9.

157. 213A, India, 7 July 1869, SIM 51, p. 71.

158. For Russian objections to settlement of a similar nature, see Kaye to Seton Karr, 11 August 1869, Arg. P. Reel 312.

he recovered what had been slipped away during the division and consequent weakness in the Government of Afghanistan.<sup>159</sup> The despatch of 1871 kept close to the lines suggested by Kaye. In support of the British argument, it was maintained that the Oxus had practically formed the limit of the conquests of Dost Muhammad and that the possessions of the present Amir in the north-west and in the north appeared to coincide 'almost exactly' with those held by his father.<sup>160</sup> Arguing that these were his patrimony and were now in his actual possession, the river was presented as forming the limit of Sher Ali's kingdom.<sup>161</sup>

The immediate reaction of the Russians to Mayo's despatch was one of indifference. In a memorandum<sup>162</sup> prepared after persistent reminders from Buchanan, the Russians refused to discuss the problem of precise definition. Indeed, Stremoukoff assured the British ambassador that the definition of the frontier might be considered only after a decision had been arrived at with regard to the neutralisation of the small states extending from Herat to Badakshan and Kokand.<sup>163</sup> Thus, the Russians refused to allow Forsyth's formula to supersede the principles of a neutral zone.<sup>164</sup> The despatch of the Government of India was therefore considered inconsistent with the precise sense of the understanding in assuming that the Oxus was the boundary and in supporting the view on historical grounds and not on the basis of the territory actually held by the Amir of Kabul.<sup>165</sup> In defence of its stand, the Russians maintained that Bukhara had always had territories on the left bank of the river, that Maimena had constantly retained its independence while Badakshan itself was a disputed territory which the Afghans had never possessed.<sup>166</sup>

159. *Ibid.*

160. 27, India, 20 May 1870, LXXV, C. 704, p.44.

161. Mayo was, however, still reluctant to give a definitive opinion on the subject. Thus the frontier was presented as 'sufficiently correct for all practical purposes', subject to future modifications. *Ibid.*

162. 'Memorandum', Enclosure in Buchanan to Granville, 25 Jan. 1871, F.O. 539/9.

163. 269, Buchanan to Granville, 24 Oct. 1871, No. 253, F.O. 539/9. 254, Buchanan to Granville, 24 Oct. 1871, F.O. 539/9.

164. 'Russian Memorandum', Enclosure in Buchanan to Granville, 25 Jan. 1871, F.O. 539/9.

165. *Ibid.*

166. *Ibid.*

The British chose to remain unconvinced. The commercial importance of the Oxus and the close proximity of Badakshan to Gilgit and Hunza offered overwhelming advantages.<sup>167</sup> 'On no account,' Rawlinson insisted, 'ought the British to entertain a proposition to withdraw these districts from the Government of Kabul.'<sup>168</sup> Indeed the India Office went even further than Mayo in defence of Indian interests.<sup>169</sup> Thus it advised the Indian government to redraft the Afghan frontier along the lines suggested by Rawlinson so as to include Wakhan within Afghanistan.<sup>170</sup> Mayo adopted the delineation thus recommended<sup>171</sup> while the Foreign Office forwarded the revised pattern of the Oxus complex in a despatch to St. Petersburg.<sup>172</sup> The most striking feature of the despatch was the unilateral decision taken by the British in vindicating the rights of Sher Ali without any reference to the Russians. Prince Gortchakoff had, therefore, reasonable grounds for taking offence and for viewing the note as an ultimatum,<sup>173</sup> for it showed that the British government had taken a step which it had been the policy of the Imperial Government to prevent. Furthermore, the delineation had been necessarily final in its character since Sher Ali had been informed that he would be at liberty to defend his territories, should they ever be attacked.<sup>174</sup>

The political victory for Britain was a diplomatic defeat for Russia. It could not, therefore, have been expected that, having gone so far in Central Asia, Russia would passively submit to a political defeat that might impair her influence in the provinces she had already conquered. Her surrender in that particular case would have had an important bearing on her plan for the chastisement of the Khan of Khiva.<sup>175</sup> It was, therefore, natural that Russian diplomacy

167. On the importance of Badakshan see, 'The Progress of Russia in Central Asia', Memorandum, C. 17, p.19.

168. Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on the Boundary between Bokhara and Cabul', undated, sent to the Foreign Office on 5 December 1871, Enclosure in No. 263, F.O. 539/9.

169. *Ibid.*

170. 263, Merivale to Hammond, 6 December 1871, F.O. 539/9

171. Governor-General in Council to the Duke of Argyll (secret), 5 April 1872, Enclosure in 310, F.O. 539/9.

172. 197, Granville to Loftus, 17 October 1872, P.P. 1873, LXXV, C.699, p.1.

173. Loftus to Granville, 25 December 1872, GranP. 91.

174. 197, Granville to Loftus, 17 October 1872, P.P. 1873, LXXV, C.699, p.1.

175. 'Memorandum on the correspondence with Russia', by M.R. Michell, 20 January 1873, F.O. 539/9; Granville to Loftus, 1 January 1873, GranP. 114.

henceforth would be devoted to inducing the British government, under certain promises and assurances, to abandon the most important item of their note, which was founded on the principle that Great Britain was at liberty to make independent arrangements with her Central Asian allies. Thus, despite his initial irritation, Gortchakoff soon adopted a more conciliatory tone.<sup>176</sup> The Russians now seemed perfectly satisfied with the British definition of the boundary from Kerki to the junction of the Kokcha river.<sup>177</sup> Beyond that point the Russians objected to the incorporation of Badakshan on two grounds, namely the strategic position of Wakhan which commanded Bukhara, Kokand and Kashgar and its commercial importance for there was a good road which traversed Badakshan to Kashgar.<sup>178</sup> Much of the rigidity of the Russian stand, however, hinged on the false location of that district on the current Russian map and a clarification of its actual situation weakened much of her resistance.<sup>179</sup> By the turn of

176. Loftus to Granville, 20 December 1872, GranP. 91.

177. No. 356, Loftus to Granville (Confidential), 2 December 1872, F.O. 539/9.

178. No. 370, Loftus to Granville, 25 December 1872, F.O. 539/9.

179. Apart from the objection arising from the insecurity of sovereignty, the Russian despatch stated that one of the reasons why they could not acknowledge Wakhan to be a portion of Afghanistan was that if that claim was admitted the authority of Sher Ali would be extended far to the north, as Wakhan lay side by side with Karategin. The Russian map was based on the authority of the Oriental Scholar, Klaproth who had sold two impressions of the same map to the Russians and the English governments along with the accounts of two fictitious journeys to the area concerned from the Indian and the Russian frontier respectively to illustrate the authenticity of his map. In reality the map was an impression of a Chinese map with all its irregularity, prepared upon an expedition sponsored by the Chinese government in 1759. The surveyors of 1759, constructed the map on the spot in squares representing an area of about 50 miles and these squares were incorporated by the cartographers at Pekin into one map, and by some error of judgement the square containing Wakhan and Badakshan had apparently been turned from east and west to north and south, so that the relative positions of the places altered by 90 degrees. The perverted geography of Wakhan and Badakshan was for a long time accepted as genuine both by the Russian and the English Governments. By the time of the present negotiations, however, the English had revised the map in accordance with the more reliable information available to them through both European and native sources, which proved sufficient to convince the Russians. For a detailed discussion on Klaproth's map and the

the year there was a noticeable change in Russia's stand: she no longer insisted on Bukharan claims over Badakshan.<sup>180</sup> But the proposed delineation, she insisted, would alter the *status quo* and invest the political complex of the Oxus valley with the character of annexation in favour of Afghanistan.<sup>181</sup> In the face of British opposition it was further conceded that Russia would be satisfied on this account if assurances were given that Afghan rights over Badakshan and Wakhan would not be immediately enforced by military occupation.<sup>182</sup> Endorsing this Russian proposal Loftus suggested that 'if some satisfactory explanation or assurances could be given that Afghanistan should not profit by the engagement to pursue any aggression against her neighbours, Russia would adhere to the limits laid down in Granville's despatch.'<sup>183</sup>

As the negotiations veered towards a compromise solution, Kaye and Rawlinson held the Indian front. 'We should stand to our guns and on no account yield this point.' Kaye insisted that 'to make Badakshan independent of Kabul would be very shortly to make it a dependency of Bokhara (i.e. Russia) and we must take all possible measures not to allow them to cross the Oxus.'<sup>184</sup> Rawlinson emphasised the expediency of denying Russia any say in the affairs of Badakshan once Russia had renounced Bukharan interests in that area.<sup>185</sup> Michell, the Central Asian expert of the British Embassy in St. Petersburg, urged the Cabinet to retain complete freedom of action 'without any engagements or any understanding' with the Russians.<sup>186</sup> Saunders advocated the retention of the whole of the Upper Oxus zone

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consequent inconveniences, see a) 'Presidential Address on Badakshan and Wakhan', P.R.G.S., (1872-3), Vol. XVIII; (b) Col. H. Yule, 'Notes regarding Bolor and some names in the Apocryphal Geography of the Upper Oxus', J.R.G.S., XLII, 1872.

180. Rawlinson, 'Memo on the Afghan frontier', Enc. in No. 400, 15 January 1873, F.O. 539/9.
181. 355, Loftus to Granville, 23 December 1872, No. 371, F.O. 539/9.
182. No. 370 (Most Confidential), Loftus to Granville, 25 December 1869, F.O. 539/9.
183. Loftus to Granville, 25 December 1871, GranP. 91; Loftus to Granville, 9 January 1873, GranP. 91.
184. J. Kaye to Hammond, 1 January 1873, No. 385, F.O. 539/9. See also 'Memorandum' by Kaye, 31 December 1872, No. 385, F.O. 539/9.
185. 'Memo by Rawlinson', 15 January 1873, F.O. 539/9.
186. 'Memorandum by M.R. Michell', 10 January 1873, Enclosure in 401, F.O. 539/9.

including Darwaz, Karategin, Shignan etc. as one unit under a friendly political system, and the exclusion of Russian commercial monopoly from Bukhara and Khiva.<sup>187</sup>

Strangely enough, the opinion of the specialists was of little importance to the amateurs in charge of policy-making. The Duke condemned Michell as a Russophobe 'in communication with all the editors of the English Press', and given to an 'extraordinary and absurd excitement about Central Asia'.<sup>188</sup> The India Office refused to back Saunders' political and economic views.<sup>189</sup> Halifax was in favour of a neutral zone beyond Afghanistan, comprising what remained of Kokand and Bukhara.<sup>190</sup> The Cabinet, however, chose to remain unconvinced. On the contrary, it had decided not to make representations 'which would irritate the Russians without in the slightest degree deterring them'.<sup>191</sup> Gladstone would have liked to agree with Russia on some such basis as this: that Russia should recognise the *status quo* as to the frontier, including Badakshan and Wakhan. Reciprocally, the British would concede the internal government of these provinces.<sup>192</sup> It was finally agreed that the best course was to get it recognised that the Afghans should rule in those districts, leaving it to the Indian government to check Sher Ali in any aggressive movements against Bukhara.<sup>193</sup> This, Hammond thought, 'we should have no difficulty in doing and we could put pressure on Sher Ali without entering Badakshan'.<sup>194</sup> Encouraged by the prospect of a fair settlement, Northbrook proffered further concessions. It was advisable, he wrote, 'not to insist upon Wakhan being within our limits'.<sup>195</sup>

187. T. Saunders, 'The Boundaries of Afghan-Turkistan with a view to the transit trade of the Upper Oxus,' 10 January 1873, Encl. in No. 1, F.O. 539/9.

188. Argyll to Northbrook, 14 February 1873, N.P.; Argyll to Northbrook, 28 March 1873, N.P.

189. Grant Duff to Melville, 17 January 1873, No. 1, F.O. 539/9.

190. Halifax to Argyll, 16 January 1873, Arg. P. Reel 313.

191. Kimberley to Granville, 30 June 1873, CranP. 55.

192. 'So that', Gladstone added, 'it would be a condition of the arrangement that the suzerainty indicated by tribute should continue and the *dominion directum* which the Russians apprehend could not come into existence without destroying the arrangement.' Gladstone to Granville, 2 June 1873, CranP. 55.

193. Hammond to Gladstone, 3 January 1873, HamP, 24.

194. *Ibid.*

195. Northbrook to Granville, 31 January 1873, N.P./C. 114/21/22.

It was in this atmosphere of a desperate bid for a settlement that Count Schouvaloff visited London on Brunnow's personal initiative.<sup>196</sup> The envoy's assurances,<sup>197</sup> together with the correspondence between the two governments in the early months of 1873, terminated the protracted negotiations.<sup>198</sup> The effect of the understanding was quite dramatic. In return for the Russian assurance not to annex the whole of Khiva, Granville promised not to create any diplomatic embarrassment over their projected operations in Central Asia.<sup>199</sup> To the north of Afghanistan, the question of the frontier was reopened, as the rights of Sher Ali were reduced to a mere claim,<sup>200</sup> thus overriding the serious objections of the India Office.<sup>201</sup> The upper course of the Oxus had been accepted in India simply as the northern boundary of Afghan Turkistan. 'I have not given the upper course of the Oxus', Wheeler reiterated in refuting the charge of inaccuracy in Saunder's note,<sup>202</sup> 'as the boundary of Bukhara, nor could I do so, inasmuch as the independent states of Darwaz, Hissar and Wakhan intervene between Bukhara and the upper course.'<sup>203</sup> Such was the character of the frontier in Mayo's despatch of 1870,<sup>204</sup> and its revised

196. In order to avoid any further delay and embarrassment Brunnow had established direct communication with the Emperor. At least Granville was made to believe that Schouvaloff's mission was arranged over the head of Gortchakoff. Granville to Loftus, 1 January 1873, GranP. 114.

197. Granville's memo on the conversation, GranP. 98. Also, Granville to Gladstone, 8 January 1873, A. Ramm (ed.), '*Political correspondence etc.*', *op. cit.*, No. 810, p. 371.

198. Granville to Loftus, 24 January 1873, P.P. 1873, LXXV., C. 699, p. 15; Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 31 January 1873, P.P. 1873, LXXV., C. 699, p. 15.

199. On the completion of the Khivan expedition Granville wrote to Loftus: 'You will see that the English press is much excited by the terms of the treaty with Khiva as inconsistent with the spirit of declaration which the Emperor spontaneously ordered Count Shouvaloff to make. Individually, I do not think that there is much to complain about the treaty on its own merits, as it is the result of a costly expedition carried on by a powerful country for a cause which at the time was admitted to be just.' 114, 27 November 1873, GranP.

200. Granville to Loftus, 24 Jauuary 1873, P.P. LXXV., C. 699, p. 13.

201. Draft proposed by Mr. Kaye (undated), Arg. P. Reel 315.

202. T. Saunders, 'Remarks on the Map and Memorandum of J.T. Wheeler relating to Afghan-Turkistan', 10 November 1869, M.P. 5.

203. J.T. Wheeler, 'Note on Mr. T. Saunders' remarks on Afghan-Turkistan Map and Memorandum', 20 December 1869, M.P. 5.

204. 27, India, 20 May 1870, P.P. LXXV., C. 704, p. 44.

version of 1872,<sup>205</sup> and there was no inclination to consider the territory on the right bank of the Upper Oxus as belonging to Bukhara.<sup>206</sup> Under the final arrangement it was not required of the Russians to cede or be partners to ceding any territory to Afghanistan, but simply to agree to prevent Bukhara from crossing the line of the Oxus.<sup>207</sup> The British, on the other hand, agreed to prevent Afghanistan from altering the political *status quo* of Badakshan.<sup>208</sup> The discussions which had been held for three years with the Russian government referred particularly to the nationality of the district of Badakshan, and the question of the details of the frontier by which that district was limited was subordinate to it. Much to the satisfaction of the British government, the Bukharan ambassador at St. Petersburg renounced all pretensions over Badakshan in the presence of Forsyth and Stremoukoff.<sup>209</sup> True, the presentation of the British case was ambiguous. In particular, the Afghan claim over Badakshan and Wakhan was inconsistent with the recognition of the Oxus as constituting the northern boundary of Afghanistan.<sup>210</sup> Although the actual extent of Wakhan was virtually unknown to contemporary geographers, it was acknowledged by both parties that the river Punja did not correspond to the northern and eastern frontiers of the district.<sup>211</sup> Yet the Russian communication that terminated the discussions referred simply to the validity of the river frontier.<sup>212</sup> Thus, to all intents and purposes, the Oxus line had the priority of preference in the final settlement. Evidently, the British

205. Governor-General in Council to Secretary of State, 5 April 1872, Enclosure in 310, F.O. 539/9.

206. Mayo to Argyll, 24 January 1870, M.P. 38/1, No. 29.

207. Northbrook to Argyll, 3 January 1869, Arg. P. 313.

208. *Ibid.*

209. Forsyth to Buchanan, 5 November 1869, Encl. in 73; Buchanan to Clarendon, 5 Nov. 1869, No. 234. Both in F.O. 539/9.

210. It ran as follows : 'Badakshan with its dependent District of Wakhan from the Sarikul (Wood's Lake) on the east to the junction of the Kokcha river with the Oxus (on the west, the line of the Oxus) or Penjah forming the Northern boundary of this Afghan province throughout its entire extent.' The words in brackets were omitted by mistake. For a discussion on this technical point, see Alder's '*India's frontier etc.*', *op. cit.*, pp. 184-5.

211. See, for example, Rawlinson, 'Memorandum on the Boundary between Bokhara and Cabul', undated, Encl. in 263, F.O. 539/9; T. Saunders, 'The boundaries of Afghan-Turkistan with a view to the transit trade of the Upper Oxus', 10 January 1873, Enclosure in No. 1, F.O. 539/10.

212. Gortchakoff to Brunnow, 31 January 1873, P.P. 1873, LXXV, C. 699, p. 15.

government had no delegated authority from Kabul to accept new possessions or alienate old ones. Indeed, the demands of imperial necessity were deemed superior to the claims of Kabul.<sup>213</sup> Thus, no attempt was made to ascertain the authenticity of the frontier from Kabul ; no attention was paid to apparent contradictions in the British despatch, once a little verbal surgery by Saunders had restored its intended meaning,<sup>214</sup> while the conclusion of the negotiations were communicated to Sher Ali as information and not to get his consent.<sup>215</sup>

The conflict between the declared principle and the facts of the situation contained the seeds of future trouble ; all the more so when it was discovered that the Oxus line did not correspond to Badakshan territory at several points<sup>216</sup> other than the ruby mines which Wheeler knew of.<sup>217</sup> Besides, there were some other significant implications of the settlement. First, the territories on the right bank of the Upper Oxus were for the first time recognised as Bukharan.<sup>218</sup> Secondly, the assurance to maintain the *status quo* in the administration of Badakshan confirmed the Russian concept of a neutral zone as Sher Ali was precluded from integrating that province into his dominion.<sup>219</sup> Thirdly, further to the east the negotiations did not cover any territory beyond Wood's Lake. Perhaps it was felt that Atalik's territory included that area. It was, however, within the bounds of reasonable expectation that Russia, having declared Kashgar to be under her protection, might establish a cantonment or a 'serai' at Tashkurgan or Sirikul. Russia would then have the right to enter into relations with Yassin. Evidently, the inconvenience that might have resulted if the Russians occupied territory bordering on Yassin could be neutralised by a corresponding

213. The liberal spokesman in the Commons defended the stand on the plea that it would have been a 'cruel kindness' to have encouraged Sher Ali to realise his dubious claims over 'certain hut villages'. Hansard, CCXIV, p. 787.

214. Alder, '*India's Frontier etc.*', *op. cit.*, pp. 184-5.

215. Argyll to Northbrook, 9 October 1873, N.P.

216. S.C. Bayley, 'Note on the Pamir Question and the North-East Frontier of Afghanistan', 19 November 1891, Memorandum, A. 82.

217. Wheeler, 'Memorandum on Afghan-Turkistan', *op. cit.*, M.P. 5.

218. It was implied that it was the responsibility of Russia to restrain Bukhara from transgressing the river in that direction.

219. It was only in the context of such an obligation that Northbrook's attempt to cultivate the Mir's of Wakhan and Badakshan may be appreciated. See ch. 3.

ascendancy of British influence in Chitral, exercised through Kabul or Kashmir.<sup>220</sup>

Throughout the course of the negotiations, the British showed an extraordinary 'dread of giving offence to Russia'.<sup>221</sup> Whatever the reasons might have been, the Foreign Office was half-hearted in scrutinising Russian activities in Central Asia.<sup>222</sup> By the end of 1869, Clarendon had considerable misgivings as to the intentions of Russia. In the meantime, preparations were being made for annexing Khiva to the Russian Empire. The non-restoration of Samarkand was a serious departure from what Gortchakoff had led Clarendon to expect. The Foreign Secretary, however, remained satisfied in view of the corresponding increase in the strength of the British in India.<sup>223</sup> Granville, his successor, seemed rather philosophically detached about the Russian advances. As he could not explain the reasons for Russian moves he preferred to make no fuss about them.<sup>224</sup> Argyll was chiefly concerned with the creation of a buffer between the Russians and the British. To him the outer boundary of Afghanistan was to circumscribe the limits of British jealousy. Yet, it was becoming increasingly difficult for Argyll to be indifferent to the turn of events in Central Asia. In view of the growing alarm of the India Office, he was soon to concede that restraint ought to be imposed upon the Russian generals, but 'only by civil persuasion'.<sup>225</sup>

Diplomatic vigilance, however, was maintained from India. To that end Mayo had returned to his cordial relationship with Buchanan. Upon Mayo's request, Buchanan felt it wise to emphasize to the Tsar that the British government could not reasonably deny Sher Ali a right to re-establish his authority over the provinces which had acknowledged the sovereignty of his father.<sup>226</sup> In the frequent correspondence from the Viceroy this idea was consistently drummed into the mind of the Duke of Argyll, who, in consequence, had

220. Cf. Lytton's Gilgit and Kashmir policy in Alder, '*India's frontier etc.*', *op. cit.*, pp. 114-137.

221. Forsyth to Mayo, 25 June 1869, M.P. 9.

222. For the policy in Persia see A.P. Thornton, 'British policy in Persia 1858-90', *English Historical Review*, October 1954, vol. 69, pp. 55-62.

223. Clarendon to Buchanan, 5 January 1870, B.P. In letter : 1870; Clarendon to Buchanan, 19 January 1870, B.P. In letter : 1870.

224. Granville to Argyll, 6 January 1872, GranP. 51.

225. Argyll to Granville, 10 January 1872, GranP. 51.

226. 112, Buchanan to Clarendon, 26 July 1869, P.P. 1873, LXXV, C. 704,  
p. 12.

moments of misgiving as to the success of a policy aimed at depriving Sher Ali from his patrimony.<sup>227</sup> To Buchanan, Mayo repeatedly insisted on the expediency of impressing upon the Russian adversaries the overwhelming moral and material superiority of the British in Asia and the political wisdom of a policy of restraint.<sup>228</sup> Buchanan endeavoured to drive the impression home. He often 'slightly crooked'<sup>229</sup> Mayo's letters to suit his purpose and elicited assurances from the Prince to fence the Empire with a ring of independent states. Placed between a temporising superior and an overzealous Viceroy, Buchanan acted cautiously. His official position, however, did much to dilute Mayo's efforts to remonstrate with Russia. The Home authorities were suspicious of the 'most extraordinary state of fidget in India'.<sup>230</sup> Early in June 1869 Argyll had complained of Mayo's excesses.<sup>231</sup> By November he was seriously concerned at the ulterior motives of Mayo's diplomacy, then being executed through Forsyth. The Foreign Office was more vocal in its indignation.<sup>232</sup> Unless put under a strong dose of sedatives, they feared, the Government of India would involve India in difficulties and war.<sup>233</sup>

The tension in London was considerably eased when Northbrook assumed office. The new Viceroy was a good Tory in Indian politics.<sup>234</sup> He was clearheaded and had a great capacity for mastering issues, but he was a little too cautious and unimaginative.<sup>235</sup> Northbrook's views on the general question of Central Asian affairs were, as he himself confessed, 'extremely paradoxical'.<sup>236</sup> The more Russia extended her possessions in those parts, he claimed, to the satisfaction of the Russophile Secretary of State, the more open she was to injury from India, while for her part

227. 'I confess', Argyll wrote, 'I doubt the possibility of preventing him (Sher Ali) sooner or later trying to recover the cis-Oxus province.' Argyll to Clarendon, 22 October 1869, GranP. C. 500.

228. Mayo to Buchanan, 20 September 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869; Mayo to Buchanan, 7 November 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

229. Buchanan to Mayo, 13 November 1869, B.P. Out letter : 1869.

230. Hammond's note on Persia, 1 December 1869, CranP. C. 503.

231. Argyll to Mayo, 4 June 1869, M.P. 46, No. 6.

232. Argyll to Clarendon, 15 November 1869, CranP. C. 500 (Folder 3).

233. Hammond to Clarendon, 24 August 1869, CranP. C. 503.

234. H.H. Durand, '*Life of Sir A.C. Lyall*', London, p. 170.

235. *Ibid*; Argyll to Gladstone, undated 1872, GLP. 4102.

236. Northbrook to Argyll, 28 March 1873, N.P.

stronghold stood dangerously close to Herat,<sup>244</sup> and under the terms of the newly developed Turko-Afghan agreement, the Turkomans were expected to organise their resistance from Herat.<sup>245</sup> Further, Prince Yakub, whose rebellious disposition was notorious, might have turned towards the Russians, once they were in possession of Merv. Faced with possible Afghan disillusionment with the British alliance, Northbrook began to realise the weakness of the professed policy.<sup>246</sup> At Simla, he had consented, upon Argyll's instruction, to abide by the established policy.<sup>247</sup> But while the Indian government agreed to remain quiet, action was demanded of the Foreign Office. Thus Northbrook drew up a despatch<sup>248</sup> in the form of a resume of the correspondence with Russia, with a distinct intimation of the position that the Indian government was prepared to assume if Afghanistan was attacked, and with a request to communicate the despatch to Russia.<sup>249</sup> Even Argyll saw no objection to this provided 'nothing is asked of Russia, but simply a communication is made.'<sup>250</sup> The despatch was, however, shelved in the Foreign Office. It was feared that it might lead to fresh negotiations and a re-opening of the discussions.<sup>251</sup>

By December 1873 the Merv operation had been decided.<sup>252</sup> The gravity of the situation was felt in London, but Argyll remained as detached as ever. Russia had, he argued, some plausible grounds of action against the Turkomans. Hence, the British had hardly, he concluded, a right to forbid their action against those tribes, simply because 'we suspect Russia of ulterior designs.'<sup>253</sup> It was obvious that if there was a Russian move towards Merv 'all England was very

244. See the report of Col. Baker, 2 July 1873, N.P.

245. Northbrook to Halifax, 6 February 1874, N.P.

246. *Ibid*; Northbrook to Perry, 20 January 1874, N.P.

247. See chapter 3.

248. (Secret) Governor-General in council to the Secretary of State, 30 June 1873, Encl. 1, in 196, F.O. 539/9.

249. Para. 18 of *ibid*, which formed the core of the despatch, held that the Government of India could not look upon an attack upon Afghanistan with indifference. Cf. Northbrook to Granville, 30 June 1873, N.P./21/2, p. 93; also Northbrook to Aitchison, 15 June 1873, N.P./14.

250. Argyll to Granville, 7 August 1873, GranP. 15

251. Argyll to Northbrook, October 1873, N.P.

252. No. 416 (Confidential), Loftus to Granville, 1 December 1873, No. 273, F.O. 539/9.

253. Argyll to Granville, 7 December 1873, GranP. 51.

### **3 | Afghan Diplomacy : Mayo, Northbrook and Sher Ali**

Trans-frontier and Afghan relations under Lord Mayo, as has been explained earlier, were guided by considerations of both commerce and strategy. Mayo was not in favour of rash military adventures. 'No one can be more impressed,' he wrote, 'than I am with the necessity for abstention on the part of the Government of India from interference in Asian politics.'<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, he made it very clear that any system of antagonism initiated by Russia would not be viewed with indifference in India. Any energetic move made by that power towards India ought to be counteracted by an equally strong manoeuvre.<sup>2</sup> In relation to Afghanistan, this policy meant a growing ascendancy of British influence in Kabul, centred on a powerful monarchy as against inter-tribal dissensions. 'We should establish', he wrote, 'with our Frontier states of Khelat, Afghanistan, and possibly at some future date with Yarkand, Nepal and Burmah intimate relations of friendship' with a view to rendering them the 'outerworks of our Empire'.<sup>3</sup> Thus, he would strenuously oppose any attempt to neutralise those territories. In fact, while maintaining their autonomy and nationality,<sup>4</sup> Mayo sought to bring them within the British sphere of influence, with all the commitments which such a policy would have entailed. Commercially, this would have opened a new field for expansion to Indian economic interests, which had witnessed a remarkable boom in the sixties.<sup>5</sup>

1. Mayo to Argyll, 16 March 1869 Arg. P. Reel 311.
2. Mayo to Bartle Frere, 29 July 1870, M.P. 35/2, No. 88.
3. 'Memo on Persia', Mayo, 28 February 1871, M.P.6.
4. 177, Government of India, Foreign Department, Political (Secret), to Argyll, 3 June 1869, enclosure in Mayo to Argyll, 3 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 300.
5. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 222.

alternative of meddling and interfering by subsidies and emissaries'.<sup>13</sup> He was firmly opposed to any attempt to take direct part in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.<sup>14</sup> All he desired was security of trade and the frontier-policing of the wild tribes who had for many years given so much trouble. And yet, his interest in a definite arrangement on the basis of a 'strong and permanent government in Afghanistan', betrayed obvious signs of a more active policy rather than a partial shift of emphasis.<sup>15</sup> If the intended visit of the Afghan ruler was meant to denote recognition of a *de facto* sovereign, the departure from Lawrence, Argyll feared, would be all but complete.

Indeed, Argyll would have agreed with Mayo that it would be inadvisable to retain a Tibetan policy in the East. In an official memorandum he insisted that the British ought to have, along the whole of the western and north-western frontier of India, if it were possible, a string of independent native states to stand between the Indian Empire and any of the Asian States which were subject to the influence of European politics.<sup>16</sup> 'We ought not to allow, I think', Argyll wrote, 'if we can help it, any one of these Great Powers to march with us on our Indian frontier'. Pursuing this line of argument, Argyll contended that Persia was a power 'sufficiently great and above all sufficiently under the influence of European politics, exercised through Russia', to render it highly inexpedient that she should be in immediate contact with India on the south-western or Sind frontier. To the north-west, Argyll maintained, Afghanistan would in all probability be the only region intervening between British India and Asiatic Russia. Apparently, therefore, there seemed no conflict of opinion between Mayo and Argyll, both being inclined to keep Persia and Russia at arm's length from the Indian frontier.<sup>17</sup>

Yet there remained a basic difference of approach, for Argyll acted in the belief that the desired objective could be achieved in terms of a neutral zone without committing the British to the establishment of a united and friendly Afghanistan. No treaty obligation with the Afghan Amir, no extension of commitments beyond

13. Mayo to Argyll, 25 March 1869, M.P. 34, No. 111.

14. Mayo to Argyll, 7 February 1869, M.P. 34/2; the same in Arg. P. Reel 311; also Mayo to Argyll, 16 March 1869, M.P. 34/2, No. 101.

15. Mayo to Argyll, 7 February 1869, M.P. 34/2, No. 60.

16. This is the undated memo by Argyll on Persia, (Confidential) M.P. 5.

17. Gladstone was very critical of Argyll's memo and declared 'it was old Pam all over again'. Argyll to Clarendon, 1 December 1869, C. 500, CranP. Folder 3.

the Indian frontier, and no scheme of supporting Afghan aggression against what were considered the independent Khanates of Balkh and Kunduz was ever entertained by the Secretary of State.<sup>18</sup> To emphasise this point, Argyll argued that assistance to Sher Ali had been given free from any condition that might bind the British government in future. 'I assume', he urged strongly, 'that whatever has been done was with no other desire than to cultivate good relations with the *de facto* government of Kabul.'<sup>19</sup> Mayo was thus instructed to maintain towards Central Asia 'that policy of reserve and abstention from interference which had been pursued by his predecessors', and any departure from that 'wise policy' was to be notified beforehand.<sup>20</sup>

On the question of financial assistance to Sher Ali, Mayo was to be most cautious, for any engagement on this issue might compel the British government to depart from the established policy of recognising the *de facto* ruler. Further, it might invest the claims of a future ruler, if he were turned out of Kabul in the event of war, with a legitimate demand for intervention on his behalf.<sup>21</sup> Hence every opportunity was to be taken not to leave even an expectation in the mind of the Amir that he was to get an annual subsidy, and, at all events, no engagement to that effect was to take place. This was to be distinctly stated to and understood by the Amir.<sup>22</sup> In fact, the burden of the traditional policy of minimum involvement in Afghan affairs hung heavily on the India Office. Even Lawrence, now far from the excitement of the north-western frontier, took great pains to interpret his despatch in terms of 'masterly inactivity'—as only a temporary measure to deal with an exceptional circumstance.<sup>23</sup>

Argyll's instructions left Mayo little room for manoeuvre. But if all positive commitments were out of the question, Mayo resorted to winning the Amir over with the paraphernalia of ceremonials and sincere assurances. He was prepared to accord to the Amir the most open and absolute recognition. Furthermore, he was determined to give Sher Ali moral support by making public show of friendliness

18. Argyll to Mayo, 19 February 1869, M.P. 47, No. 7; Argyll to Mayo, 4 June 1869, M.P. 47, No. 16.

19. Argyll to Mayo, 19 February 1869, M.P. 47, No. 7.

20. *Ibid.*

21. Argyll to Mayo, 7 May 1869, M.P. 47, No. 15.

22. Argyll to Mayo, 26 February 1869, M.P. 47/8.

23. Lawrence to Mayo, 4 May 1869, M.P. 54.

towards Afghanistan and towards the Amir himself. In addition, the Viceroy was to extend to the Amir such support as he required in the form of money, arms or ammunition. The reception in Ambala was organised in such a manner as to give the visit the character of a meeting between equals and to show the world that the British government looked on the Amir as an independent, and not a feudatory, prince.<sup>24</sup> In every case where this was possible, former precedents were departed from, and, in the Durbar and elsewhere, it was especially emphasised that an occurrence of this particular kind had never taken place in India before.<sup>25</sup> In this, Mayo was quite successful without giving offence to the Sikh chiefs of the Punjab, who detested the Afghans but who were persuaded to respond to the invitation of the Viceroy in welcoming to their country a distinguished guest. The striking processions of officers, native chiefs and carriages ; the march-past of troops in every type and colour of uniform; the camel corps of the Maharaja of Patiala armed with matchlocks three hundred years old; the newly-formed mountain battery of steel guns ; the spectacular camp on an immense plain against the background of the first spurs of the Himalayas ; the ceremonials of the Durbar and the exchange of swords echoing the chivalry of a romantic age—all this was calculated to impress upon [the Afghan mind the strength and might of the British Empire.<sup>26</sup> In so far as the pageantry of Ambala<sup>27</sup> captured the imagination of the unsophisticated Barakzai, hardened by a prolonged civil war, and revived his confidence in a British alliance, Mayo had scored. 'I now begin', Sher Ali exclaimed, 'to feel myself a king',<sup>28</sup> and he left Peshawar, 'greatly pleased with his visit and most wonderfully impressed with the display of our power and wealth'.<sup>29</sup>

Behind the spectacles of the Durbar, Sher Ali had bargained to reach a settlement with Mayo. He had relied on the ambiguity of imprecise diplomatic jargon throughout his journey to Ambala

24. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 22.

25. Mayo to McLeod, 11 March 1869, M.P. 34/2, No. 59, p. 202; Mayo to Mansfield, 21 March 1869, M.P. 34/2, No. 106.

26. For the ceremonics at Ambala, see M.P. 'Central Asia—Umballa', I h.

27. 'I wish', Mayo wrote to Disraeli, 'you could have been there. It is real business here. Govt. pure, powerful and just. Responsibility clear and defined, resting only on the hand of your Viceroy, who is well able to bear it'. 2 May 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 53.

28. Quoted in W.W. Hunter : '*Life of Lord Mayo*', Vol. 1, London, 1875, p. 258.

29. Mayo to Northcote, 1 April 1869, M.P. 35/2.

and kept the Viceroy speculating on his ulterior intentions.<sup>30</sup> It was not until the first secret meeting on 29th March 1869, that the Amir showed his hand. This enhanced his bargaining position as Mayo would not have let him return unhappy after the lavish display of splendour and cordiality. It was evident that the real grudge of the Amir was against the one-sidedness of the British alliance, which he called a 'dry friendship'. In particular, he made his opposition quite clear to the repeated recognition by the Viceroy of both Afzal and Azim as Amirs, despite the earlier treaty objections to the contrary, and especially in view of the fact that Sher Ali had at no time lost control of the territory of Afghanistan.<sup>31</sup> As a corrective to past misfortunes, the Amir earnestly urged the government to recognise and acknowledge not only himself but his lineal successors in blood.<sup>32</sup> He made other demands complementary to recognition, such as a treaty, a fixed annual subsidy, assistance in arms (to be given 'not when the British government think fit to grant, but when he might think it needful to support it'), and recognition for his younger son, Abdullah Jan.<sup>33</sup> Although these were unacceptable to the Government of India, Mayo felt that the Amir would remain content with a solemn promise that under no circumstances would the British repeat the policy of 1867 and acknowledge a *de facto* ruler while any part of Afghanistan remained in his hands.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, Mayo agreed to reassure the Amir with a letter, in which the desire of the Government of India for strong and independent rule as well as its deep interest in the affairs of Afghanistan would be set forth. In drafting the letter, however, Mayo ran into difficulties. At least two of the members of the Viceroy's Council thought it did not go far enough and wished for

30. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 22.

31. Memo of private meeting between the Viceroy and Sher Ali on 29 March 1869, M.P. 5 (Central Asia) I.W.

32. The terms used by the Amir were mum-wa-oulad-inum, translated as successors in blood, and nustan-bad-i-nustan or generation to generation. He was most sincere in his proposition. He emphasised that to acknowledge the rule *de facto* was to invite competition for a throne and excite the hopes of all sorts of candidates and if the British Government would recognise him and his dynasty there was nothing he would not do in order to acknowledge his gratitude and support them with all his means and his life, 'it being understood that the slightest failure on his or his descendants' part should cancel all engagements'. *Ibid.*

33. Mayo to Fitzgerald, 17 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 31.

34. Marginal comments by Mayo: 'Memo of private meeting between the Viceroy and Sher Ali on 29 March 1869, at Umballa', M.P. 5.

an offensive and defensive treaty with the Amir. Besides, there was considerable pressure to give the Amir a large addition to his subsidy immediately so as to enable him to consolidate his rule. Mayo would not concede any of these demands.<sup>35</sup> Nor was he desirous of broaching the Central Asian Question,<sup>36</sup> much to the disappointment of the more energetic politicians at home. Indeed, the political and diplomatic presence of the British at Kabul could have been viable only through an independent Afghanistan and Mayo took considerable pains not to allow the world to think that the Amir had gone back to Kabul as a regular stipendiary of the British government.<sup>37</sup> Besides, he was anxious to ensure that the policy adopted would receive the approval of the Home government.<sup>38</sup> Under such circumstances, the original draft<sup>39</sup> of the letter fell far short of Sher Ali's expectations<sup>40</sup>, and, upon further deliberation, the letter was made more emphatic.<sup>41</sup>

In a sense, this meant a departure from Mayo's original draft in order to meet the Amir half way or at least part of the way.<sup>42</sup> In his official despatch,<sup>43</sup> Mayo emphasised the negative side of the commitments primarily to stress the continuity of traditional policy. It was held that the Amir was to have no treaty, no fixed subsidy, no European troops, officers or residents, no dynastic pledge and no diplomatic action in his favour. In the list of what the Amir was to have, Mayo included warm countenance and support, discouragement of his rivals, such material assistance as the Indian government might consider absolutely necessary for his immediate wants, constant and friendly communications through the commissioner at Peshawar and a native agent at Kabul; while the Amir for his part would undertake to do all that he could to maintain peace on the frontier. Great efforts were made to render the despatch

35. Mayo to Argyll 8, April 1869, M.P. 35/2, 35.

36. Mayo to Argyll, 18 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, 36.

37. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, 22.

38. Mayo to Argyll, 8 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, 35.

39. Mayo to Sher Ali, 31 March 1869, P.P. 1878-9, LVI, p. 464.

40. The Amir desired, in particular, two paragraphs to be inserted in the letter binding the British Government to take from time to time such measures as his welfare might require and not to acknowledge any friend in the whole of Afghanistan other than the Amir and his descendants. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, 22.

41. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, 22.

42. Mayo to Argyll, 18 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, 36.

43. Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, P.P. 1878-9, LVI, p. 466.

free from 'any danger of misconstruction'.<sup>44</sup> In the original draft of the despatch it had been maintained that the British government was to show active interest in favour of Sher Ali. Subsequently, however, it was felt that the words 'warm and real interest' were quite sufficient.<sup>45</sup> Also, the expression 'rightful ruler' in the letter to the Amir had at first been defended on the plea that any other term would have been inapplicable. Subsequently, it was found safer to say 'any other term could not have been so appropriately applied'.<sup>46</sup> As regards the question of aid to the Amir, the Viceroy maintained that he was hardly prepared to go as far as Lord Lawrence had gone. He did not contemplate, he argued, giving annual grants or adding to the amount already given to Sher Ali, unless it was quite clear that 'the British interest would be thereby advanced'.<sup>47</sup> In reply to apprehensions in London that the expression 'severe displeasure' used in the letter to the Amir might be interpreted in a practical sense as fighting for the Amir and against his enemies,<sup>48</sup> Mayo held with considerable strength of argument that such an impression was 'exactly the reverse of what was meant at Umballa'.<sup>49</sup>

Mayo's explanations, however, failed to disguise the new realities in terms of the traditional policy. 'I do not stop to enquire', Mayo wrote, 'whether in respect especially to our Frontier relations we have changed our policy, but fully admit that we have done things that might have been impossible a year ago and that we have endeavoured to take advantage of the actual state of politics in Central Asia'.<sup>50</sup> The letter to Sher Ali, for instance, was too unqualified and far exceeded the instructions of Argyll. The Duke agreed that for the purpose of promoting the establishment of a strong and settled government, it might be wise, from time to time, to assist with money and arms any existing ruler of Afghanistan 'whose character and position appeared to afford the best hopes of establishing such a rule'.<sup>51</sup> But it must depend, he insisted, not only upon the conduct of the ruler of Afghanistan in his relations with the Government of India, but also upon his conduct with his own people.

44. H. Durand to Mayo, 28 June 1869, M.P. 52/XII.

45. *Ibid.*

46. *Ibid.*

47. Mayo to Rawlinson, 7 May 1869, M.P. 52.

48. Argyll to Mayo, 7 May 1869, M.P. 47, No. 15.

49. Mayo to Argyll, 3 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 96.

50. Mayo to Durand, 27 July 1870, M.P. 3, No. 215.

51. Secret Despatch to Government of India, 4 May 1869, Arg. P. Reel 315.

'It could not be for the credit of the British government to support the Ameer either by money or arms', Argyll reiterated, 'if he succeeds in establishing a government which is strong but notoriously cruel or oppressive'.<sup>52</sup> It does not require much elucidation to establish that the verbal instructions, which Mayo gave to the Amir to reorganise his administration on humane principles, were not enough to leave the Indian government free to withhold assistance or to express displeasure in case of a rebellion owing to 'unjust' rule.

As regards financial assistance, although there was no undertaking to pay the Afghan ruler an annual subsidy, Mayo by no means meant that 'it might not be a sound policy to give the Ameer some more money as he must have been sorely strained by his late trouble'.<sup>53</sup> In his private correspondence he confessed that the Amir was not told if the sum of money given to him was a donation and not a subscription.<sup>54</sup> In defence of a proposal for a fresh subsidy, Mayo, however, harped on the familiar note that such a grant was 'very different from mixing ourselves up in a family quarrel'.<sup>55</sup> Even as regards the presence of British troops in Afghanistan, Mayo was soon to introduce new qualifications. In defence of the shift of emphasis, he proceeded on the assumption that as the question of foreign invasion had not been alluded to at Ambala, the course of action in such a contingency would not in the least be affected by anything that had taken place there.<sup>56</sup> Hence, he argued, the case would be different if Afghanistan was attacked from without. 'Then it might be indispensable for the safety of India', he concluded, 'that we support the rulers of Cabul with men, money and arms'.<sup>57</sup> One would like to draw special attention to the words 'rulers' and 'men' in the preceding sentence so as to underline the scope of the obligations undertaken in Ambala. Argyll had also taken strong exception to the use of the term 'rightful ruler' in the letter to the Amir. It is true that such an expression might have been construed to pledge the Government of India to an acknowledgement of the divine sovereignty of Sher Ali, on which question the India Office had desired not to

52. *Ibid.*

53. Mayo to Argyll, 7 July 1871, M.P. 44/3, No. 155.

54. Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 103.

55. Mayo to Argyll, 7 July 1871, M.P. 44/3, No. 155.

56. Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, Arg. P. Reel 311.

57. Mayo to Argyll, 7 July 1871. M.P. 44/3, No. 155.

commit itself.<sup>58</sup> Significantly enough, in the original draft of the letter to the Amir, it was proposed to use the word 'righteous', a term which might have been more acceptable to the Home authorities, and it was 'after much consideration and discussion' that the word 'rightful' was preferred.<sup>59</sup> In the official despatch, the Government of India sought to defend the use of the term on strictly legal grounds by referring to the views expressed by Lord Canning and Lord Lawrence, who had recognised Sher Ali in different contexts as the lawful ruler.<sup>60</sup> As evidenced by the subsequent negotiations in Simla and in Peshawar,<sup>61</sup> it appears that Mayo meant to take a more liberal view of the engagement than was expected of him by the Home government, and that the Amir was encouraged to believe that the old policy of recognising the *de facto* ruler was at an end. At any rate, Mayo was willing to support and encourage Sher Ali in his attempt to establish a dynastic but benevolent despotism, and recognition was promised, subject to his success. Moreover, Mayo was inclined to make allowance for the period of turmoil and disaffection which the transition from a tribal confederation to a centralised monarchy was sure to bring. He was not indifferent to the extension of obligations,<sup>62</sup> but the use of a less forcible expression, he argued, 'would have misrepresented our intentions and feelings and would probably have defeated all the objects of the Conference'.<sup>63</sup> Immediately on the conclusion of the ceremonials in Ambala he urged on the Secretary of State the importance 'of not emphasising what we are not going to do for him' in the Parliamentary Paper, for it might lead the Amir to believe that 'we do not intend to assist him

58. No. 6, Secret Despatch to India, 4 May 1869, Arg. P. Reel 315; also see Argyll to Mayo, 7 May 1869, M.P. 47, No. 15.

59. H. Durand to Mayo, 28 June 1869, M.P. 52, XII.

60. Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, P.P. 1878-9, LVI, 466 p.

61. Northbrook to Argyll, 8 September 1873, N.P.

62. 'Had I taken the other course and sent him back without a single word that could have been of the best use to him, we should have lost the only opportunity that perhaps will be offered for a long time of gaining the friendship of Afghanistan, our 12 lakhs would have been thrown into the fire, a fair field for Russian intrigue and Persian annoyance and in every little disaffected Durbar in India, it would have been whispered that the Lord Sahib had fallen out with the brother of the man who had murdered a British Envoy and destroyed a British army'. Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/2.

63. *Ibid.*

for the future and that we have eloped with him at Umballa'.<sup>64</sup> Soon he was to concede that great responsibilities in Afghan affairs had already been incurred.<sup>65</sup> Argyll was much concerned at Mayo's engagement and, in an official despatch, instructed that Mayo should communicate to the Amir in writing the precise terms of agreement to supplement the verbal explanations 'which the Amir was said to have understood perfectly at Umballa', especially with regard to armed intervention and financial assistance.<sup>66</sup> When Mayo asked him to reconsider the case,<sup>67</sup> Argyll dropped the instruction. It was, nevertheless, maintained that the principles laid down in the official despatch were to be rigorously followed at all future proceedings.<sup>68</sup>

An assessment of the Afghan reaction to Mayo's policy can only be made in terms of the structure of Afghan loyalties and of the impact of the Ambala entente on the crystallisation of the political arrangements at Kabul. As has been explained earlier, the revolution which led to the transfer of power from the descendants of Ahmad Shah to the sons of Payindah Khan Barakzai was more than a change of personnel. In terms of power politics, it meant the triumph of a national combination of Ghilzais, Kohistanis and Parsiwans as opposed to the tribal pretensions of the Durrani oligarchy of the south.<sup>69</sup> The civil war that followed the death of Dost Mohammad only reinforced this trend of events. In four years, five armies had been raised among the Durranis of Kandahar; three fought for Amir Sher Ali against the Kabulis, one against him and

64. Mayo to Argyll, 18 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 35.

65. Mayo to Argyll, 29 October 1869, M.P. 37/4, No. 295.

66. 6, Secret Despatch to India, 4 May 1869, Arg. P. Reel 315; Argyll to Mayo, 7 May 1869, M.P. 47, No. 15.

67. Mayo to Argyll, 1 July 1869, M.P. 36/3. The correspondence between Mayo and H. Durand reveals the reasons for the official representation against Argyll's instructions. It was apprehended, for example, that such a move might leave the impression on the mind of the Amir that 'we were reverting to the policy of supporting any *de facto* ruler'. Besides, the insistence of the Secretary of State as regards precautions to be taken in case of civil war, was rejected on the grounds that the Amir should not be allowed to feel that 'we contemplate and are forecasting the chances of such another contest for power'. Moreover, the administration was cautious not to 'cramp the Amir in measures he may think necessary for the security of the frontier'. See Durand to Mayo, 22 August 1865, M.P. 52/XII; and Mayo to Durand, 22 August 1869, M.P. 52/XII.

68. Secret Despatch to India, 27 August 1869, Arg. P. Reel 315, P. 115.

69. 'Memorandum on Southern Afghanistan', by Major St. John, 1 November 1879, LyP. 10.

one against the Heratis. At first sight this would appear to indicate an extraordinary fickleness. But there was a thread of consistency throughout. The Durranis went out to fight not this or that Sardar, but the Ghilzais of Kabul or the Char-Eimaks of Herat. Their object was to resist the supremacy of Kabul or Herat, and to ensure the perpetuation of a powerful, semi-feudal aristocracy, of which the Shah or Amir was only *primus inter pares* as against the hereditary despotism of the Barakzais.<sup>70</sup> But as soon as the Amir was firmly seated on the throne, the promises that he had made to his Duranni adherents were cast to the winds.

The reception in Ambala by the British government and Mayo's encouragement for the creation of a strong monarchy were responded to warmly by Sher Ali. As the distant provinces owed allegiance to the Kabul authority, the Amir inaugurated a series of almost revolutionary reforms calculated to strengthen the state and its army. They included, among other things, measures to collect direct revenue, the centralisation of the administration, means of controlling hitherto semi-independent governors, the dismissal of irregular militia, the raising and drilling of a voluntary force, and even the abortive attempt to recruit a foreign militia of Hindustani, Punjabi and Sikh soldiers. Other measures included the exaltation of the position of monarch, the institution of a postal system, a restriction of the political influence of the Ulema and the construction of roads. Measures were adopted to ensure the right to nominate a successor, hitherto unknown in Afghan society, overlooking other candidates by means of a strong court-party rallying round the king and a successor to the throne.<sup>71</sup> The Durranis naturally were the principal victims of the reforming zeal of Sher Ali.<sup>72</sup> It was

70. Elphinstone, '*An account of the Kingdom of Caubul*', *op. cit.*, Vol. II, Book V, chapter I.
71. The principal source for the reforms of Sher Ali are the Kabul diaries of the agent. For some collected material on the point see Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 103. Macleod to Mayo, August 1869, M.P. 54/XXLL; R.H. Davies to Northbrook, 28 September 1875, N.P./17, p. 327; 'Queries from Sooltan Mahomed, orderly', enclosed in Mayo to Argyll, 17 October 1869, Arg. P. Reel 312; 'Memo. of Capt. Grey : some particulars regarding Afghanistan and Sher Ali', 9 May 1870, M.P. 5 (1).
72. Certain facts may be given to illustrate this point. In earlier times, the Kandahari Sardars furnished a contingent of 8000 horsemen, a corresponding proportion of the land being remitted to them on account of that  
(see next page)

the Ghilzais who became the chief prop of the Barakzai regime.<sup>73</sup> Few in the Indian administration could have doubted the merit of Sher Ali's case and all reports showed that as far as its internal management was concerned, Afghanistan was in a stronger position than it had ever been before, while, economically, it was 'certainly better than under the Dost'.<sup>74</sup> Such reforms in their initial stages were bound to release forces of opposition, fed by the disaffection of the offended aristocracy. After the initial burst of enthusiasm the Amir showed considerable moderation.<sup>75</sup> But if reform meant

(from previous page)

service. This contingent, the Amir reduced to 700. Of the 58 regiments of infantry and 12 of cavalry which constituted the Afghan army in 1879, 49 of infantry and 9 of cavalry were Kabuli, six infantry, Herati and only the remaining three infantry were raised among the Durranis of Kandahar. The revenues of Kandahar, estimated during the latter years of Dost Muhammad's reign at seven lakhs of Company rupees, were raised to over thirteen lakhs by 1879. Previously the whole revenue had as a matter of right and justice, as understood by the Afghans, been spent in the country by a local governor. The fall in the number of troops now recruited meant export of cash and foodgrains from Kandahar to the north. Among the Afghan power-elite, only one Sher Ali Khan Kandahari represented the ancient ruling family, but even he was summoned to Kabul, where he was detained. See for more details, 'Memorandum on Southern Afghanistan', Major St. John, LyP. 10, and Ghulam Ahmad's Kabul Narrative, enclosed in Secret Letter from India, 6 July 1874, SIM 15.

73. It seems that gradually every post in the Government and the army had been filled by 'Oprah', strangers, as the Durranis termed all the people of the country but themselves. To take those whose names had become familiar to the British, Nur Muhammad Shah, Sher Ali's trusted adviser and Prime Minister, was a Persian Saiyyad; Safdar Ali Khan, Amir's Commander-in-Chief was a Herati; Mustafi Habibullah Khan and Saud Shah Khan were Wardaks, a tribe generally believed to be Ghilzais; Shah Muhammad was a Ghilzai; Fakir Ahmad Khan was a Rika, a Parsiwan tribe settled near Kabul; Naib Mhd. Alun Khan of Turkistan was a Ghilzai and Ghulam Haidar Khan was a Mandak. By 1869, 80 per cent of the men of the 58 Kabuli regiments were Ghilzai. The two Ghilzai chiefs Ashmat Ullah Khan and Ursulla Khan received more allowance than they had enjoyed before. The governors of Jalalabad, Ghazni and Turkistan were Ghilzais, etc. See Ghulam Ahmad's Kabul narrative, 6 July 1874, *ibid.* Also St. John, 'Memorandum on Southern Afghanistan', 1 November 1879, LyP. 10.
74. Commissioner and Superintendant, Peshawar, to Secretary to the Govt. of India, Foreign Department, enclosure in Secretary's secret letter from India, 6 July 1874, SIM 5.
75. Mayo to Rawlinson, 2 September 1869, M.P. 36/3.

At Amballa he had insisted on its security as the price of British assistance.<sup>84</sup> Mayo was certain that much could be done by pushing Indian goods through the Amir's dominions.<sup>85</sup> There was some initial irritation and much opposition from the commercial interests of the Durbar, which between them had monopolised the entire trade through Jalalabad.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, considerable progress was made by Sher Ali<sup>87</sup> in that direction, and Mayo was able to write as early as May 1869 that the benefits produced by even the slight increase in trade which had taken place tended 'to spread the truth that for the present the Government of India is the paramount Power in Asia'.<sup>88</sup>

In fact, when British diplomacy had failed to make a client-state out of Afghanistan, Mayo sought to achieve his object by means of gentle persuasion and personal ascendancy. The question of whether Russia had a right to send an agent to Kabul was still open and Mayo played up the problem of the danger to the lives of foreigners in Kabul so as to get Gortchakoff to agree that such a venture was not safe and would not be undertaken.<sup>89</sup> Clarendon had encouraged Forsyth to return to India through Central Asia, which might have offered an opportunity for re-opening the issue.<sup>90</sup> Mayo's remonstrance with the Home authorities proved decisive.<sup>91</sup> To the Afghan ruler, he emphasised the Russian assurance to consider Afghanistan as beyond Russian influence. It encouraged the growth of a powerful British lobby in Kabul, which, if used carefully, might have excluded Russian interference from Afghanistan once and for all.<sup>92</sup> The success of Mayo's Afghan diplomacy was exemplified by the perfect ease with which Sher Ali was persuaded to abandon his project to lead an expedition on Kersi,<sup>93</sup> and to deal with Kauffman's letters.

84. McLeod to Mayo, 13 March 1869, M.P. 54/XXXII; Mayo to Pollock, 9 August 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 189.
85. Mayo to Argyll, 25 March 1869, M.P. 34/2, No. 167; Govt. of India (Political Department) (Secret) to Argyll, 27 May 1869, SIM 6.
86. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, Arg. P. Reel 311.
87. Ghulam Ahmad, 'Kabul Narrative', Enclosure in Secret Letter from India, 6 July 1874, SIM 15.
88. Mayo to Rawlinson, 19 May 1868, M.P. 29/2, No. 131.
89. *Ibid.*
90. Forsyth to Mayo, 7 June 1869, M.P. 9vi.
91. Mayo to Forsyth, 22 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 171.
92. Mayo to Buchanan, 7 November 1869, M.P. 37/4, No. 288.
93. *Ibid.*

interference in the internal affairs of that country'.<sup>102</sup> Unlike Mayo, Northbrook would view the constitution of Khelat as oligarchic and would insist on the rights of the Sardars as opposed to the despotic power of the Khan.<sup>103</sup> Sandeman was his choice for dealing with tribal matters. In fact, Northbrook lacked the imagination of Mayo, and the problems of moulding a despotism out of the confusion of tribal pretensions, which had been Mayo's primary concern, made little impact on his mind. He would insist, on the contrary, that the dignity of British power had to be maintained and no allowance could be made on this account, regardless of native customs and the naivete of the Afghans. The Amir was to be told curtly and in plain language that the privilege of having direct communication with the Viceroy could not be extended to the Afghan minister,<sup>104</sup> and that Granville ought to be referred to in official correspondence as the Earl Granville.<sup>105</sup> In fact, Northbrook could not grasp the nature of the Anglo-Afghan relations developed under Mayo. Far from welcoming the socio-political transformation of Afghanistan, he was apprehensive of the new tide of centralisation and the gradual eclipse of the natural system of check and balance so characteristic of the Afghan tribal system.<sup>106</sup> His officials lamented the decline of 'great men' in Afghanistan. They were suspicious of the use that Sher Ali might make of his strength. 'I am inclined to think,' wrote H. Davies, 'the Amir's position is too strong to be shaken, as it would cost him little to throw over the zealous financiers [the British].'<sup>107</sup> Thus on every problem of Indian interest that was related to defence and Afghanistan, Northbrook differed materially from Mayo. An attempt may therefore be made to analyse the reactions of the two administrations towards the major issues confronting Anglo-Afghan relations, in order to appreciate the decline of the Ambala entente.

The establishment of a recognised frontier for Afghanistan was one of Mayo's prime concerns. As far as the north and north-west were concerned, this priority was founded on the fear of a Russian

<sup>102.</sup> Northbrook to Rawlinson, 9 June 1873, N.P./21, p. 2..

<sup>103.</sup> 13 of 1875 Government of India, Foreign Department (Political), to Salisbury, 22 January 1875, SIM 19. Also see note of O.T. Burne (Secretary, India Office), with above. p. 325.

<sup>104.</sup> Commissioner of Peshawar to the Amir, enclosure in Northbrook to Salisbury, 18 December 1874, N.P./22.

<sup>105.</sup> Northbrook to Argyll, 3 July 1873, N.P./21.

<sup>106.</sup> R.H. Davies to Northbrook, 18 September 1875, N.P./11, p. 372.

<sup>107.</sup> *Ibid.*

only through the Indian Viceroy.<sup>94</sup> Mayo could not take offence at Kauffman's letters to Sher Ali, as had been suggested by his Indian subordinates. But he could always rely on Afghan opposition to what they considered to be the peace offensives of the Russian general. For his part, Sher Ali successfully served Mayo's interests, so long as he continued to remind Kauffman of Russian assurances.<sup>95</sup> 'What a hold I have got on Afghan Politics without incurring a liability !' Mayo exclaimed. 'If I can get the Seistan Boundary settled this winter...we shall still further tighten our hold on the Afghan ruler and lay him under eternal obligation'.<sup>96</sup>

Things began to take on a new complexion under Northbrook. His approach to the Afghan question had been shaped about twenty years earlier when, as Secretary of the India Office, he had written his memorandum on Afghan policy. He would keep on good terms with the Amir and 'defy Russia and Persia together', and with 'a sort of connection with Kashgar'<sup>97</sup> he thought he might make Turkistan a good deal too hot for Russian occupation if he were driven to act against them.<sup>98</sup> 'To my mind', he wrote to his friend shortly after becoming Viceroy, 'there has been too much trouble taken to please the Amir of Afghanistan of late years. He is now drifting into a mess and is always in a state of impecuniosity and is pretty sure to want more money from us soon and to give us small thanks for it'.<sup>99</sup> Thus he would not make special efforts to cultivate him, for if Persia were to join Russia it was 'sure to make the Afghans join us'.<sup>100</sup> On his appointment he had assured Brunnow that he was not disposed to share the exaggerated apprehensions of the Russophobes in India.<sup>101</sup> So far as he understood the British policy, it was that 'we shall be friends with the *de facto* ruler of Afghanistan, but avoid any further

94. For Kauffman's letter, see Kauffman to Sher Ali, 28 March 1870, P.P. 1881, XCIVIII, p. 335.

95. The answer to Kauffman's letter was drafted by the Government of India. See the text in the despatch to Argyll, 24 June 1870, P.P. 1878, LXXX, p. 633.

96. Mayo to Argyll, 21 July 1871, M.P. 44/3, 166.

97. Northbrook in fact gave excessive importance to Yarkand relations, despite reports of an impending restoration of Chinese rule in that province. See Alder, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-72.

98. Halifax to Northbrook, 1 May 1873, N.P./21.

99. Northbrook to Grant Duff, 8 July 1872, N.P./20, p. 12 (11).

100. Northbrook to Salisbury, 18 December 1874, N.P./22.

101. Northbrook to Baring, 15 July 1872, N.P./20, pp. 16-17.

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102. Northbrook to Rawlinson, 9 June 1873, N.P./21, p. 2.

103. 13 of 1875 Government of India, Foreign Department (Political), to Salisbury, 22 January 1875, SIM 19. Also see note of O.T. Burne (Secretary, India Office), with above, p. 325.

104. Commissioner of Peshawar to the Amir, enclosure in Northbrook to Salisbury, 18 December 1874, N.P./22.

105. Northbrook to Argyll, 3 July 1873, N.P./21.

106. R.H. Davies to Northbrook, 18 September 1875, N.P./11, p. 372.

107. *Ibid.*

advance gobbling up the decaying Khanates in its course. In view of Russian designs, the problem became more than a local issue and the Foreign Office had taken the case into its own hands.<sup>108</sup> Further, the settlement as arrived at in London and subsequent negotiations had caused much inconvenience to the Government of India in its relations with the Afghan ruler. The government under Mayo never accepted any settlement on the basis of a neutral zone.<sup>109</sup> As regards the frontier of Afghanistan, it upheld, despite stern resistance from the India Office, the right of Sher Ali to unite all the territories that had once belonged to his father and defended the frontier of the Oxus<sup>110</sup> as an accomplished fact so far as Afghanistan was concerned.<sup>111</sup>

There was a marked shift of emphasis as soon as Northbrook arrived in India. Early in 1873, Northbrook ventured to make major concessions on Badakshan and Wakhan in order to appease Russia.<sup>112</sup> Evidently, he judged the merits of the case merely by the demands of British strategy, and once Forsyth's Yarkand investigation approved of the Oxus line, Northbrook desired no more.<sup>113</sup> The Kabul ruler was not consulted about it. On the contrary, he was requested to receive Forsyth on his way back to India.<sup>114</sup> In view of

108. See ch. II.

109. Mayo to Alison, 29 October 1871, M.P. 45, No. 4.

110. ch. II.

111. On the admission of the Government of India, however, it was evident that the Afghan sovereignty was not fully acknowledged by Maimena and that as late as the summer of 1870, Alum Khan, the governor of the Afghan Turkistan, wrote of the disaffection of the Mir of Maimena. In August 1870, there was a nominal show of loyalty but subsequently the Mir entered into correspondence with the Afghan refugees in Bukhara and Samarkand and Sher Ali thought it expedient to keep the Maimena matter in abeyance during the current year, the settlement of Badakshan being felt the more pressing business of the two. It was only by the middle of 1870, that a semblance of Afghan sovereignty was extended to Andkoi, Siberghan, Siripul, Tashkurghan, Badakshan and Kunduz when representatives of Siripul, Tashkurghan, and other States attended a great entertainment under the auspices of Faramoz and Alum Khan. 'Statement regarding the recent Political States of Maimena, the Petty Chiefs between Balkh and Oxus and Badakshan, based on the weekly diaries of the English Agent at Kabul', enclosure in Governor-General in Council to the Secretary of State for India, 1872, F.O. 539/9, No. 318.

112. Rawlinson to Northbrook, 17 January 1873, N.P./21/1.

113. Northbrook to Rawlinson, 8 May 1874, N.P./15.

114. Northbrook to Forsyth, 14 May 1874, N.P./15, p. 125.

the interest shown by the government towards Yarkand and its upstart ruler, it was not unnatural for the Afghan ruler to apprehend an attempt on the part of the British government to extend the Yarkand territory towards Badakshan.<sup>115</sup> Moreover, Sher Ali could have taken legitimate offence at the attempt by the Indian government to cultivate the subordinate Mirs of Badakshan and Wakhan, bypassing the suzerain power of Kabul.<sup>116</sup> It was almost at the same time that the Government of India proposed that Colonel Baker should proceed to India through Herat and Kandahar while another British officer with his entourage would proceed towards Seistan, Herat and all along the frontier up to Wood's Lake.<sup>117</sup> The presence of Europeans in Afghan territory was bound to hurt the susceptibility of the Afghan ruler whose confidence in the British alliance had been waning since the assassination of Mayo. When the request for such a reception was declined Northbrook interpreted it as an act of hostility.

To the west and north-west, the problem of frontier settlement came into conflict with the Persian policy of the Foreign Office. Herat was universally considered the key to India,<sup>118</sup> and twice the British had gone to war with Persia over its integrity. The seizure of Herat by Dost Mohammad in 1863 was deliberately overlooked by the Calcutta administration, but the Persian government could never reconcile itself to the loss of Herat. In 1868, Yakub Khan had made overtures to Persia through Meshed in the hope of assistance for Sher Ali's cause.<sup>119</sup> The British had anticipated the intended Persian move. The fate of Herat nevertheless remained uncertain, especially in view of Yakub Khan's popularity with the Herati tribes,<sup>120</sup> and his rebellious disposition prompted by

Sher Ali's partiality for the clique around Abdullah Jan. The problem was rendered even more complicated by the fluid political relationship in the north-west of the province of Herat. This region was inhabited by tribes of Hazara Eimaks, consisting of Firuzkuhis, Jemsheedhis, Hazaras and Teymoonis and belonging to a Persianised Uzbeg and Turkoman stock, owing allegiance to the Afghan ruler of Herat<sup>121</sup> but having close affinity with the Turkomans of Merv who, in turn, had begun to feel the pressure of the Russian advance from the west and north.<sup>122</sup> Time and again, the Turkomans had expressed their intention of coming under the protection of the Afghan ruler and Yakub was very eager to extend the Afghan dominion up to the Merv oasis.<sup>123</sup> Mayo's solution to the problem raised by Herat lay in postponing the date of frontier delineation in that quarter, thereby encouraging the creation of a settled political relationship in and around Herat. Upon the termination of the Ambala conference, the Persians inaugurated a project to woo the Governor of Herat, Prince Yakub Khan, and encourage him to open communication with the Shah.<sup>124</sup> Sher Ali's irritation was justified and Mayo supplemented the Afghan measures to neutralise such a move by making it known to the Persian government in plain language that no attempt to alter the *status quo* of Herat would ever be tolerated.<sup>125</sup> In October 1866, Mayo made representations to the Home government to carry the proposed Oxus line further to the west, as far as Kerki, so as to cover Herat more effectively under Afghan sovereignty.<sup>126</sup> In July 1870, when the Russians threatened to advance towards Charjoi, Mayo protested on the grounds that the territory belonged to Khiva.<sup>127</sup> He was, in fact, seriously alarmed at the prospect of a nucleus of Russian loyalty in the neighbourhood of Herat and Merv, thus seriously competing with Afghan interests in those areas. But the Russians were still far away and Khiva and the Turkomans were still independent. Mayo would thus be satisfied if the Afghans were allowed to put their house in order at Herat and develop closer ties with the Turkomans of Merv as a preliminary to an ultimate delineation.

121. Elpinstone's '*Caulbul*' etc., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 204.

122. 'Supplementary Note on the Turkomans, Char Eimaks and Seistan',—  
J.T. Wheeler, 15 January 1870, M.P. 4, pp. 39-41.

123. *Ibid.* p. 35, para. 36.

124. Mayo to Alison, 19 February 1870, M.P. 35/2, 101.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Mayo to Argyll, 22 October 1869, M.P. 34.

127. Mayo to Argyll, 15 July 1870, M.P. 35.

On the question of Herat, Northbrook adopted a rigid view of the agreement of 1873. 'Our engagement with Russia with respect to the frontier of Afghanistan,' he wrote in 1875, 'precludes us from promoting the incorporation of the Turkomans of Merv in the territories subject to the Ameer of Kabul'.<sup>128</sup> He would not even see the extension of Persia towards Merv.<sup>129</sup> As far as the nationality of Herat was concerned, Northbrook took its Afghan character as settled. He would have defended Herat had it been attacked, but nothing short of an actual invasion would have prompted him into action.<sup>130</sup> In fact, he was reconciled to an eventual Russian occupation of Merv.<sup>131</sup> In view of Sher Ali's uneasiness upon Khiva's surrender to Russia, Northbrook found himself in a dilemma. He would not view unfavourably the extension of Russian rule over Merv. On the other hand, he had no means of proving the pacific disposition of Russia towards the Afghan prince. He thus sought to arrive at a compromise solution. The Russians might be induced to postpone their occupation of Merv, he argued, if the Indian government declared its intention to stand by Sher Ali, if attacked.<sup>132</sup> In fact his administration was sceptical about Sher Ali's discomfiture.<sup>133</sup> Northbrook argued that it might be expedient to allow the Russians to occupy Merv so as to drive the Afghans into a British alliance heart and soul.<sup>134</sup> Accordingly, Sher Ali was repeatedly warned not to entertain any overtures by the Mervians.<sup>135</sup> Such unsympathetic demeanour on the part of the Indian government, immediately after Mayo's encouragement to form an Afghan-Turkoman alliance, did not fail to make the Barakzai court somewhat suspicious.

To the south-west of the Afghan kingdom at Seistan, the Indian government came sharply into conflict with the Home government over the rights of Sher Ali. Mayo was inclined to accept the view generally held by politicals in India that it was inadvisable to give priority to Persia rather than to Afghanistan as a barrier against the

128. Minute by Viceroy, encl. No. 123 of 1875, Government of India, Foreign Department (Political), to Salisbury, 7 June 1875, N.P./23.

129. *Ibid.*

130. *Ibid.*

131. Northbrook to Salisbury, 13 December 1874, N.P./23.

132. *Ibid.*

133. Davies to Northbrook, 11 May 1873, N.P./14, p. 168.

134. Northbrook to Rawlinson, 2 January 1874, N.P./1.

135. Northbrook to Argyll, 21 July 1873, N.P./21.

Russian menace. The general superiority of Russian influence due to her remarkable geographical proximity had rendered it difficult, indeed almost impossible, to inaugurate a matching response to Russian influence at Teheran. Hence, from the Indian point of view, concessions to Afghanistan at Seistan and the presence of British influence exercised through the Persian Gulf were measures both indispensable and sufficient to buttress British interests in that part of the globe.<sup>136</sup> The Foreign Office saw the matter in a different light. Persia was a more stable nation than Afghanistan in that she enjoyed international recognition, and as such, could not be placed as subsidiary to the local problem presented by Afghanistan, where bargains could be made and decisions taken over the head of the ruling power.<sup>137</sup> It is interesting to note that while Argyll was prone to back the Indian case, both in regard to Seistan and Makran,<sup>138</sup> Rawlinson found himself in sympathy with the Foreign Office on these matters.<sup>139</sup> A sharp conflict of opinion arose between Simla and London over the basis of the arbitration sought by both the powers. Sher Ali felt strongly about it. Seen from India, there were considerable strategic and economic<sup>140</sup> reasons for the incorporation of Seistan into Afghanistan. On the other hand, Persia had encroached upon Seistan by virtue of a letter of Lord Russell authorising Persia to fight it out<sup>141</sup> and she was determined to stick to the letter as the basis of any settlement. At Ambala, the Afghan prince had urged

136. 'Policy towards Persia', Memo by Mayo, 29 December 1871, Arg. P. Reel 312. Also see Mayo to Argyll, 16 June 1869, M.P. 34, Vol. 2, No. 101.

137. Clarendon to Argyll, 3 October 1869, ClarP. C. 500.

138. Undated Memo (confidential) on Persia by Argyll, M.P. 5; Argyll to Clarendon, 1 December 1869, 21 December 1869, 11 April 1870, 30 May 1870. All in ClarP. C. 500.

139. Rawlinson's note on Seistan arbitration, 27 May 1870, encl. No. 2, in Argyll to Clarendon, 30 May 1870, ClarP. C. 500. 'Memorandum on the Question of Makran', H. Rawlinson, 18 December 1869. Rawlinson minimised the strategic importance of Seistan from the Afghan point of view. See 'Memorandum on the Frontiers of Afghanistan', by H. Rawlinson, 18 June 1869, M.P. 5.

140. Marginal note of Mayo in 'Memorandum on the Frontiers of Afghanistan', by H. Rawlinson, 18 June 1869, M.P. 5.

141. Rawlinson's note on Seistan arbitration, 27 May 1870, ClarP. C. 500; 'The Seistan Arbitration—Memorandum', by C.U. Aitchison, 12 May 1873, NaP; 'Supplementary Memorandum on the Territorial Rights to the Eastward', J.T. Wheeler, Asst. Secretary to the Government of India, 22 March 1869, Arg. P. Reel 311.

the British officials to use their good offices to settle the matter.<sup>142</sup> In due course, Mayo made it known to the Afghan ruler that arbitration could only be undertaken on the basis of 'ancient rights'<sup>143</sup> and that Persia would not be allowed to cross the Helmund.<sup>144</sup> 'I wish to show the Ameer that if we cannot get back Seistan, we can at least secure him a portion of it, and make his western and southern border safe'.<sup>145</sup> In recommending his proposal to the Home government, Mayo wrote: 'The Afghan alliance is of such importance that we can do nothing to imperil it'. The acquired right of Persia, he argued, would certainly form part of the question, but 'it would be most dangerous for us to suggest to the Ameer that he should renounce at once one-half of what he considered to be his and take his chance of getting a portion of the remainder'.<sup>146</sup> Mayo's arguments cut no ice with the Foreign Office, which, in its turn, held Rawlinson to be right. 'I do not see indeed', wrote Rawlinson, 'how we can possibly cancel the said letter. All we can do is to limit its scope'. His own formula for arbitration was, to all intents and purposes, favourable to the Persian claims. 'I think we should tell Lord Mayo that the Treaty of Paris is a solemn international contract', he wrote, 'which remains for all time and is the basis of our Perso-Afghan relations while the letter of 1863 is of mere temporary and local application, the value and effect of which must be decided by the Commission. Persia can hardly be said to make this letter the basis of arbitration, for it decides nothing, but she may fairly claim to have considered what rights she may have acquired under it'.<sup>147</sup>

142. C.U. Aitchison, 'The Seistan Arbitration—Memorandum', NapP. 5/29, p. 28.

143. Quoted in *ibid*, p. 29.

144. Govt. of India to the Secretary of State, 7 July 1870, quoted in Aitchison's Memorandum on Seistan, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

145. Mayo to Bartle Frere, 27 May 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 88.

146. Mayo to Argyll, 30 June 1870, Arg. P. Reel 313. See also Mayo to Argyll, 16 March 1869, Arg. P. Reel 311. Also see Government of India (Foreign Department, Political) Secret, 10 June 1869, No. 178 of 1869, FLI/13.

147. Rawlinson's note on Seistan arbitration, 17 May 1870, ClarP. C. 500. 'It seemed to me', Rawlinson wrote, 'quite in order that we should accept her proposal to arbitrate even with the condition that the letter of 1863 remained in force. I do not see indeed how we can possibly cancel the said letter'. Clarendon wrote on the margin of the note: "I do not see that Rawlinson was right".

Meanwhile, the work of arbitration had been delayed by the rebellion of Yakub, and in 1872, when Goldsmid was on his mission, Northbrook succeeded Mayo. The interest shown by the Indian administration in the arbitration over Seistan waned on Northbrook's arrival in India. He was not inclined to take up the initiative. On the contrary, he felt it preferable to leave Central Asian questions alone.<sup>148</sup> As regards the 'ancient rights' of the contending parties, he was soon to report that the written documents were vague. Hence it was felt safer to consider actual possession as the basis of arbitration.<sup>149</sup> In judging the merits of the case, he differed from Lord Napier and Richard Temple, who 'attached undue importance to the strategy of Seistan and apprehended the giving of the larger portion to Persia'.<sup>150</sup> Northbrook would not entertain the apprehensions of the pro-Afghan officials. He, therefore, thought it inadvisable to press Afghan claims upon Persia for the present<sup>151</sup> and would instead advance money to Sher Ali, 'to smooth the matter over'.<sup>152</sup> Accordingly, the Government of India revised their instructions to Goldsmid : 'Government gathers from papers received that the position is this : Persia holds the chief part of Seistan so firmly that arbitral opinion must be in favour of Persia ; but the boundary on Helmund from the Amir of Kayn's "bund" upwards might be secured and also a line of river onwards to the Lake'.<sup>153</sup>

Goldsmid's decision followed closely the lines suggested in Northbrook's directive.<sup>154</sup> The contending parties were authorised to raise objections, but it had been decided beforehand that 'the wisest course would be to confirm Goldsmid's decision after consideration of the objections raised by Persia and Afghanistan'.<sup>155</sup> Persia, however, proved most recalcitrant and Sher Ali was seriously concerned at not getting the whole of Seistan, or at least the better part of it, as he had been assured by Mayo.<sup>156</sup> Hence, Northbrook

148. Northbrook to Argyll, 24 June 1872, N.P./20.

149. Northbrook to Argyll, 17 June 1872, N.P./20.

150. *Ibid.*

151. Northbrook to Argyll, 1 December 1872, N.P./20.

152. Northbrook to Argyll, 31 January 1873, N.P./21.

153. Government in Council to Pollock, 27 April 1872. Quoted in Aitchison's Memo on Seistan, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

154. See the whole text of the arbitral award in print in *ibid.*

155. *Ibid.*

156. Rawlinson to Northbrook, 14th February 1873, N.P./21/1.

urged an immediate decision on the Seistan boundary in view of the uneasiness of the Amir.<sup>157</sup> He did not think that Persia ought to have less.<sup>158</sup> But it would be highly inadvisable, he argued, to give anything more to Persia than had been given by General Goldsmid in the arbitral award, 'for we should lose much influence in Afghanistan by so doing'.<sup>159</sup> But even the compensatory allowance of 5 lakhs failed to retrieve the declining influence of the British at Kabul.

One of Mayo's preoccupations in trans-frontier relations was to avoid the policy of revenge so characteristic of the Punjabee tradition of frontier administration.<sup>160</sup> He was aware of the political consequences of fighting on the frontier, not only in Hindustan but in every part of Asia.<sup>161</sup> 'I wish I could see my way', he wrote, 'to rendering their raids unnecessary and will devote my attention to that point when at Umballa'.<sup>162</sup> Evidently, Mayo was toying with the idea of dealing directly with the Amir on tribal questions, thereby helping the Afghan ruler to extend his jurisdiction over the unruly area. With him, the question did not turn so much on what the Sikhs had possessed at the time of the conquest of the Punjab, as on whether or not the British administration asserted its authority over all that it had possessed.<sup>163</sup> Such an approach to the tribal problems of the frontier found eloquent testimony in the affairs of the Sind frontier where the Governor-General had made it known in unambiguous terms that any deviation from the policy of Sind and support of the Khan of Khelat's rebellious subjects would be disapproved of by the Governor-General-in-Council.<sup>164</sup> At Ambala, he had made arrangements with

157. Northbrook to Granville, 31 January 1873, Arg. P. Reel 321.

158. *Ibid.*

159. *Ibid.* Northbrook, in fact, justified the arbitral award merely in terms of British interests. 'Should Russia meditate an attack on India', he wrote, 'via Herat, Persia could not co-operate on the Seistan side without giving us a *casus belli* against her. I doubt any settlement stopping the raids on either side in Seistan'. Northbrook to Argyll, 16 April 1873, Arg. P. Reel 321.

160. Phillip Woodruff, 'The Men who ruled India', Vol.II, *The Guardian*, 1963, p. 142.

161. Mayo to Pollock, 8 August 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 189.

162. Mayo to Argyll, 16 March 1869, Arg. P. Reel 311.

163. Aitchison to Mayo, 16 February 1871, M.P. 51 (I).

164. 'Memo by Mayo on the Policy on the Seistan and Punjab frontier', 27 March 1870, M.P. 5c; also see 'Memo by Governor-General on Frontier Policy', 28 January 1870, M.P. 5c.

the Amir to revive the subsidy paid to the Khyberis and raise it to what it had been during the days of Dost Muhammad.<sup>165</sup> Success was immediate.<sup>166</sup> Under Northbrook, there was a sudden reversal of Mayo's tribal policy. Now he was to act upon the principle that the tribes beyond the administrative frontier were independent of Kabul. Further Kabul could not enforce its authority over them although such claims had occasionally been made.<sup>167</sup> According to the arrangements at Ambala, the Amir had posted his armed men as guards at various 'chowkis'. It was now agreed that such arrangements might not be interpreted as changing the political relationships of the tribes.<sup>168</sup> 'I think', reported the Commissioner of Peshawar, 'he (the Amir) and his advisers had nursed the idea that we valued their alliance so highly that they might expect to get anything from us and their disappointment now irritates them'.<sup>169</sup> Direct communications with the tribes were re-opened and the principle by which the tribes as a whole were to be held responsible for individual crimes was introduced.<sup>170</sup> Instead of helping the Amir to bring these tribes under his control, the restoration of the old principle aimed at making them 'a good buffer between us and the hordes of fighting Pathans'.<sup>171</sup> The resentment of the Afghan ruler at the high-handedness of the Punjab administration was considerable, especially when Northbrook demanded the deposition of Naoroz Khan, the Momand chief of Lalpura and Yakub's uncle, for his slackness in capturing the assassin of Major Macdonald, a frontier official,<sup>172</sup> himself 'as untamed as any Pathan across the border'.<sup>173</sup>

165. Mayo to Argyll, 4 April 1869, Arg. P. Reel 311.

166. 'Confidential Narrative of Recent Events in Afghanistan,' H. P. Wynne, Calcutta 1871, M.P. 5.

167. Macnabb to Thornton, 4 April 1873, enclosure in Davies to Northbrook, 16 April 1873, N.P. 16.

168. *Ibid.*

169. *Ibid.*

170. Northbrook to the Queen, 24 November 1872, No. 4, N.P./21; R.H. Davies to Northbrook, 31 July 1875, N.P./17, p. 285.

171. *Ibid.*  
172. R.H. Davies to Northbrook, 3 May 1873, N.P./14. pp. 143-6; R.H. Davies to Northbrook, 6 May 1873, N.P./14. pp. 153-4; 'Memo on interview between His Excellency, the Viceroy and Syed Noor Mahomed Shah, Envoy from Highness, the Amir of Kabul, on Friday 27 June 1873.' Arg. P. Reel 318

173. Lord Napier to Northbrook, 10 May 1873, N.P./14. p. 161; Davies to Northbrook, 3 May 1873, N.P./14. p. 144.

The administration was conscious that the Amir would have felt embarrassed and even irritated if pressed to release his brother-in-law.<sup>174</sup> Nevertheless, he was obliged to comply with the demand,<sup>175</sup> even at the risk of unpopularity with his own people.

The most serious threat to Sher Ali's power was the presence of great men about the Durbar, always ready to fish in troubled waters. Such a danger was becoming all the more serious with the drastic measures of reform that Sher Ali was introducing with a view to centralising his own authority. Mayo had a remarkable understanding of the problem presented by these ungovernable Pathans and a sincere sympathy for Sher Ali's dilemma. He would from time to time resort to a mild warning, for Sher Ali could not afford to turn all his men against him.<sup>176</sup> But the Viceroy saw no reason to plead in favour of men up in arms against the established order. Early in his Indian career, he had made detailed provisions to induce Azim and Abdul Rahman, the pretenders to the throne, to come over to India on liberal terms.<sup>177</sup> His move failed because the Punjab government exceeded the instructions and attached unauthorised conditions for political asylum.<sup>178</sup> Upon Mayo's initiative, however, Persia declined to give the refugees asylum<sup>179</sup> while Kauffman agreed not to use Abdul Rahman as a trump card.<sup>180</sup> The rebellion of Ismail Khan had been caused directly by the centralising policy of Sher Ali.<sup>181</sup> The suppression of the rebellion, the mild treatment

174. Davies to Northbrook, 6 May 1873, N.P./14, pp. 153-4. It had nevertheless been decided that in view of the worst political effect of the murder of an Englishman an expedition to Lalpura, the heart of the Afghan country, in case the Amir proved unfavourable to the dismissal of Naoroz, would be undertaken. *ibid.*
175. 'Memo on interview between His Excellency, the Viceroy and Noor Mahomed Shah', 17 June 1875, Arg. P. Reel 318.
176. Mayo to Argyll, 2 September 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 227.
177. Mayo to Davies, 12 February 1869, M.P. 34/2, No. 43; Mayo to Argyll, 2 January 1869, M.P. 34/3/8; Mayo to Fitzgerald, M.P. 31/2 No. 14, 24 January 1869; Mayo to Argyll, 7 February 1869, Arg. P. Reel 311.
178. No. 140 of 1869, Govt. of India Foreign Department (Political) to Argyll 4 May 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 15; Mayo to Argyll, 19 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 37.
179. Mayo to Argyll, 7 February 1869, M.P. 34/2, No. 15.
180. Under the pressure of Indian remonstrance, Abdul Rahman was removed in June 1870 to Tashkent, away from the troubled waters of Bukhara and from the proximity of Badakshan. Buchanan to Mayo 13 July 1870, M.P. 6, IIa.
181. Mayo to Argyll, 29 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 177.

meted out to him<sup>182</sup> and his final deportation gave Mayo an opportunity to congratulate the Amir on his success, and express gratification at the merciful course of action that Sher Ali, in accordance with Mayo's suggestion, had been able to pursue.<sup>183</sup>

It was in connection with Ismail's rebellion, that Mayo raised the whole question of Afghan prisoners detained in India. Of course, Mayo would not encourage the Amir to send people, for, as he put it, 'we cannot make ourselves Sher Ali's jailers'. He would, however, add that such a function might be carried out 'to a certain extent'.<sup>184</sup> It is with this purpose in mind that he ruled out<sup>185</sup> any fixed mode of treatment and conditions which Durand desired to be declared in order to restrict Sher Ali's discretion.<sup>186</sup> The problem of internal rebellion became acute when Yakub Khan, his son by a Suddozai queen, rose against the Amir with the support of the offended aristocracy.<sup>187</sup> Throughout the course of Yakub Khan's rebellion Mayo showed considerable sympathy for Sher Ali. He had reasons for believing that Yakub intended to kill his father and hence was unable to request the Amir to conciliate such an 'affectionate son'.<sup>188</sup> Yakub's attempt to make headway towards Seistan was prevented by Persian apathy to his cause as a result of Mayo's strong representation.<sup>189</sup> Having offered his submission, Yakub made yet another escape to Herat. With Herat in hand, he sought forgiveness. Mayo

182. Mayo wrote jubilately to his superior ; 'I hope this will assure you that all that was said to the Ameer at Umballa as to our desire that he should establish a merciful rule, has borne a good print. For we are convinced that had this happened a few years ago, Ismail Khan would have been mutilated'. Mayo to Argyll, 29 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 177.

183. Mayo to Argyll, 29 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 177; same to same, 4 August 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 181.

184. Mayo to Durrand, 22 August 1869, M.P. 53/XII.

185. *Ibid.*  
186. The object of Durand was to deter the Amir from sending prisoners and, hence, he desired to prescribe certain conditions as essential prerequisite for giving asylum. Besides, he desired to mention the word 'kinsmen', in the Viceroy's correspondence to the Amir in reference to the prisoners so as 'to narrow down our jailer's office within every stringent limits'. H. Durand to Mayo, 22 August 1869, M.P. 52/XII.

187; 'Memo on Yakub Khan', undated, Arg. P. Reel 313.

188. Mayo to Argyll, 16 November 1870, M.P. 41/4, No. 314. Two days later, however, he confided that the Amir was largely responsible for the event. Mayo to Rawlinson, 19 November 1870, M.P. 41/4, No. 319.

189. Mayo to Rawlinson, 25 January 1871, M.P. 42/1, No. 31.

was aware of the delicate situation presented by Sher Ali's intended march to bring his son to terms. He might in the process have lost both Herat and Kabul.<sup>190</sup> So far Mayo had resisted all the pressure put on him by men like Rawlinson to enable the Amir to regain Herat with money and with the assistance of Anglo-Indian officers.<sup>191</sup> Such an action would have alienated Yakub who, as Mayo wrote, 'if he is not knocked on the head, is likely to play the most prominent part in Afghan politics for many a day.'<sup>192</sup> Nor could he have written to the Amir in favour of Yakub, as such a representation would have encouraged the rebellious son.<sup>193</sup> It was only upon Yakub's mission from Herat, that Mayo wrote to Sher Ali urging reconciliation with his son.<sup>194</sup> Sher Ali's response was favourable. It was, however, a temporary truce and Yakub continued to indulge in Persian intrigues only to be summoned and imprisoned in Kabul.<sup>195</sup> On the resumption of the civil war, Burne, the private secretary of the ex-Viceroy, strongly recommended a cautious move to bring about a reconciliation between Sher Ali and his son.<sup>196</sup> Northbrook demurred. Such a step, he argued, might endanger friendly relations, 'if not throw him [Sher Ali] into the arms of Russia'.<sup>197</sup> On the contrary, he made up his mind to recognise Yakub Khan, in the event of a vacancy, as a natural successor.<sup>198</sup> His sympathy for Yakub was notorious and when the Prince was imprisoned by his father, the Viceroy lost his sense of propriety and demanded the restoration of Yakub to liberty, failing which, it was threatened, the cordial relations with the British might be severed.<sup>199</sup> At Simla, he refused to recognise Abdullah Jan. The Amir reciprocated with the nomination of Abdullah Jan as heir apparent, supplemented by an 'unusual, sarcastic and somewhat insolent letter'.<sup>200</sup> The possibilities of a civil war loomed large in the

190. Mayo to Argyll, 23 June 1871, M.P. 43/2, No. 143.

191. Argyll to Mayo, 9 June 1871, M.P. 49, No. 49.

192. Mayo to Argyll, 7 July 1871, M.P. 44/3, No. 155.

193. *Ibid.*

194. Mayo to Buchanan, 24 July 1871, M.P. 44/3, No. 169.

195. *Ibid.*

196. O.T. Burne to Argyll, 23 September 1873, encl. in Argyll to Northbrook, 25 September 1873, N.P./10.

197. Northbrook to Argyll, 23 October 1873, N.P./21.

198. Northbrook to Argyll, 19 December 1873, N.P./21.

199. *Ibid.*

200. Northbrook to Argyll, 23 January 1874, N.P./22.

Duke's mind. 'We must not hastily recognise', he wrote, 'a successor who may be unable to make good his succession'.<sup>201</sup> Northbrook reacted sternly; the official announcement from the Amir of the nomination was dealt with in India as information and not a request for recognition.<sup>202</sup> Northbrook's reaction contrasted sharply with the civil response of Kauffman.<sup>203</sup>

There was another issue of some importance which irritated Anglo-Afghan relations during the days of Northbrook : the Afghan demand for security against foreign aggression. Mayo was not indifferent to the importance of the problem. At Ambala, he did not broach the issue apart from having Grey raise the matter with the Afghan minister in the hope of gauging the intensity of Afghan feeling.<sup>204</sup> At that initial stage of the alliance, Mayo wanted to show the Amir that he did not fear aggression from the north. Fortunately, the Afghan ruler was so intent on establishing himself on the throne that he had little opportunity to think either of Persia or Russia.<sup>205</sup> In his private correspondence, however, Mayo agreed that the Ambala agreement was directed to some extent against Russia.<sup>206</sup> In fact, Mayo did all that he could to ensure a steady flow of authentic information about the affairs of Kabul and the countries beyond.<sup>207</sup> His agents in Central Asia attempted to impress on the native mind the superiority of British arms and science to those of Russia.<sup>208</sup> To allay the apprehensions of Sher Ali, Mayo successfully defended Charjoi against the intended Russian take-over.<sup>209</sup> As a formal treaty with Afghanistan was precluded by the terms of Argyll's instructions, Mayo repeatedly urged the Secretary of State 'to tell Baron Brunnow the truth, namely that we should use the same influence to dissuade the Ameer from any

201. Duke of Argyll to Northbrook, 23 December 1875, N.P./10; same to same, 9 March 1874, N.P./10.

202. Northbrook to Argyll, 10 December 1873, N.P./21.

203. Kauffman to Sher Ali, P.P. 1881, XCVII, p. 343.

204. Mayo to Argyll, 18 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 35.

205. *Ibid.*

206. Mayo to Duke of Cambridge, 2 March 1869, M.P. 34/2, p. 314. No. 62; Mayo to Argyll, 18 April 1869, M.P. 35/2, No. 35.

207. Mayo to MacLeod, 30 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 178; Mayo to Argyll, 9 June 1871, M.P. 43/2, No. 132.

208. Report on Trans-Himalayan Expedition 1869, especially, para 21. M.P. 5 (i).

209. Mayo to Buchanan, 17 July 1871, B.P. In letter : 1869.

attempt at foreign aggression on his part, as we should protect him—in case he was attacked.<sup>210</sup> Such a demonstration of positive support became all the more urgent as Russian activity increased in Khiva and the Turkoman country, with adverse effects on the Afghan mind. Sher Ali's demand for a treaty against foreign aggression gradually became almost a test case of British sincerity. There was, on the other hand, a growing feeling in the Indian administration against the suspected duplicity of Sher Ali. 'I am disposed to think', wrote Davies, 'that the demand on us, put forth by the Ameer of Kabul, is indicative of a desire to make capital out of the supposed alarm caused by Russian encroachments'.<sup>211</sup> Northbrook shared his views, and at Simla, where Noor Muhammad was sent by the Amir to lobby the Afghan case, the Viceroy gave 'him a bit of my mind pretty plainly'.<sup>212</sup> Nevertheless, Northbrook was convinced that a promise of aid in the event of foreign aggression was indispensable to retain the confidence of the Afghans. But the real difficulty arose due to the inability of the Viceroy to state precisely the extent of assistance that the British government would be willing to accord to Afghanistan if she were attacked from without. In anticipation of Afghan feeling, the Viceroy, on the 27th June 1873, telegraphed to the Secretary of State the substance of paragraph 18 of the secret letter No. 68 of 1873, and proposed to inform the Kabul envoy of the same.<sup>213</sup> Argyll, in reply, did not object to the general sense of the paragraph as a communication to Russia, but added that 'great caution is necessary in assuring the Ameer of material assistance which may raise undue and unfounded expectations...'.<sup>214</sup> Thus, all that Northbrook would finally concede was aid in the event of an attack from without, but only on certain conditions. They were that Afghanistan should not be the aggressor, that the decision in such a question should rest with the British government and if there was such a dispute the matter should be referred to the British government, which would attempt to settle the-

210. Mayo to Argyll, 8 July 1869, M.P. 36/3, No. 153.

211. Davies to Northbrook, 11 May 1873, N.P./14., p. 168.

212. Northbrook to Rawlinson, 8 June, 1873, N.P./21.

213. Argyll to Gladstone, No. 6, (undated) 1873, GLP. 44104.

214. It was added : 'Cabinet thinks you should inform the Ameer that we do not at all share his alarm and consider there is no cause for it. But you may assure him we shall maintain our settled policy in favour of Afghanistan if he abides by our advice in external affairs'. *Ibid.* The same 'Tel, India, 24 July, 1873'. P.P. 1878-9, LVIC, 2190,

matter by the exercise of its good offices, failing which the question of assistance would be taken up.<sup>215</sup> Furthermore, the envoy was informed that the British government would refrain from distinctly stating that it considered any aggression of the Amir's territory as an inimical act. It would also not specifically mention the contingency of aggression by Russia in the written assurance inasmuch as this could imply an admission of the probability of such a contingency, which the British government was not prepared to admit in the face of the repeated assurances given by Russia.<sup>216</sup> In the official correspondence Northbrook further added, 'the question is in my opinion one of such importance that the discussion of it should be postponed to a more suitable opportunity.'<sup>217</sup> The effect was apparently to minimise, if not altogether to withdraw, the very guarded assurances given to Sher Ali and thus to leave the one question which the Amir seems then to have had most at heart as unsettled as before.<sup>218</sup>

Thus by the closing days of Northbrook's viceroyalty it was more than evident that the Ambala entente was a thing of the past. Ever since the meeting at Ambala, the Home government proved to be extraordinarily sensitive to any extension of commitments beyond the Khyber. Argyll had strictly defined the scope of Mayo's initiatives. When Mayo died, Northbrook became a willing partner in the game of 'least liability'. As a result, the civility and warm cordiality so characteristic of the days of Mayo, were soon to give place to suspicion and intrigue. The correspondence between Kabul and Calcutta had become extremely formal in character. Its contents were replete with accusations, explanations and counter-explanations. Sher Ali had stopped forwarding the letters of the Governor of Tashkent, who seemed all too eager to amplify the might and vigour of the Russian empire.<sup>219</sup> There was considerable discussion in the court as to the efficacy of the British alliance ; doubts were raised as

215. P.P. 1878-9, LVI, C. 2190, p. 112.

216. *Ibid.*

217. P.P. 1878-9, LCI, C. 2190, p. 114. Also, see Argyll to Northbrook, 9 October 1873, N.P./10.

218. Yet, some of the recent writers have concluded that Northbrook gave the Amir's representative promises of aid in certain conditions almost as exactly as in his original statement and that the directions from Argyll had made no alteration in its content. Cf. Alder, *op. cit.* pp. 180-1. However, both Northbrook and Argyll thought otherwise. Cf. Gladstone, 6 November 1878, GLP. 44, 104.

219. Cf. 'Memorandum on the Russian letters to Shere Ali' 1879, LyP. (4).

## 4 | Salisbury, Lytton and The Afghan Question

The general election of 1874 brought the Conservatives to power, and, with Disraeli in No. 10 Downing Street, a new sense of imperial consciousness was introduced into British political life. The extent and strength of the British Empire provided a visible sign of British power in the affairs of the world. The reverberations of the new consciousness were soon to disturb the tranquility of the Khyber hills. In Lytton, Disraeli was to find a due mixture of romance and realism, a perfect agent of the Empress of India. 'He will die', wrote Derby upon Lytton's appointment, 'but die Governor-General — perhaps it is worth while'.<sup>1</sup> Lytton, however, outlived his viceroyalty. It was Sher Ali who could not bear the strain of an Afghan war. In the present chapter an attempt will be made to examine the nature of Lytton's Russophobia and the reaction of the Home government towards it. The discrepancy between the two was real. But if Mayo had complained of the non-cooperation of the Home government, and Northbrook had resigned, tired of being overgoverned, Lytton evaded the instructions of Salisbury,<sup>2</sup> formed his own policy, and executed it independently. In short, he 'mutinied'. But the most remarkable feature was that he got away with it.

Evidently, a desire to establish a scientific frontier and to improve military and political standing formed the essence of British initiatives in Afghanistan in the mid-seventies. But it was the extraordinary restlessness of Russia in Central Asia that gave them the necessary impulse. In fact, as the Russians kept edging on along the line, the demand for a matching response acquired substantial respectability and made many converts in Whitehall. Rawlinson's

1. Derby to Disraeli, 24 December 1875, Private Drafts, 1874-5, DerP.

'Central Asia'<sup>3</sup> made its first appearance in 1874 with the tacit approval of Salisbury.<sup>4</sup> Northbrook had taken strong exception to the free use of secret papers by the author and to his suggestions for a partition of Central Asia, which could be detrimental to the somewhat precarious Afghan friendship.<sup>5</sup> The Secretary of State, however, did not consider the arguments of the Viceroy of India tenable.<sup>6</sup> Even Derby,<sup>7</sup> otherwise much impressed by the relative weakness of Russia in comparison to British power in the East, was becoming increasingly concerned about the gravity of the situation, especially in view of the great skill of the Russians in diplomacy and intrigue, in their use of opportunities and their reputation for power, 'which serves them as a means of increasing it'.<sup>8</sup> It will be instructive, therefore, to review the nature of Russian activities in Central Asia and of British apprehensions about them.

The effect of the agreement of 1873 had been neutralised by the virtual annexation of Khiva in June 1873 and the acquisition of exclusive rights of navigation in the river Oxus. The new territory acquired by Russia had enabled her in 1874 to form a trans-Caspian district under General Lomakin with headquarters at Krasnovodsk. Subsequently, Lomakin claimed supreme authority over the Atrek

2. Cecil, Robert Arthur Talbot Gascoyne, third Marquis of Salisbury, 1830-1903; elected M.P. for Stamford in 1853; became Viscount Cranborne on his brother's death in 1865; Secretary of State for India in the Derby government in 1867; resigned over the parliamentary reform bill in 1867; succeeded to his father's peerage in 1868; returned to the India Office in 1874; was sent as the British plenipotentiary to the Conference of Constantinople in December 1876; appointed to the Foreign Office on 1 April upon Derby's resignation; leader of the Conservative party on Disraeli's death in 1881; Prime Minister from 1875-1886, 1886-1892 and 1895-1903.
3. Henry Creswick Rawlinson, '*England and Russia in the East*', London, 1874.
4. Rawlinson to Northbrook, 5 August 1874, N.P./9.
5. Northbrook to Salisbury, 11 November 1874, N.P./21.
6. Salisbury to Northbrook, 14 December 1874, N.P./16.
7. Stanley, Edward, Henry, fifteenth Earl of Derby, (1826-93), statesman; Under-Secretary for foreign affairs, 1852; joined opposition to Crimean War 1855; Colonial Secretary and (after passing of the India bill) Indian Secretary in the second Derby ministry (1858-9); Foreign Secretary under Derby and Disraeli, 1866-8; again Foreign Secretary from 1874-78; resigned over Disraeli's policy in Turkey; opposed acquisition of Cyprus and Afghan War; left the Conservative party in 1880; Colonial Secretary under Gladstone 1882-5; joined the Liberal Unionists and led them in the House of Lords, 1886-91.
8. Derby to Loftus, 18 November 1874, Loftus/Drafts to 1874-78, DerP.

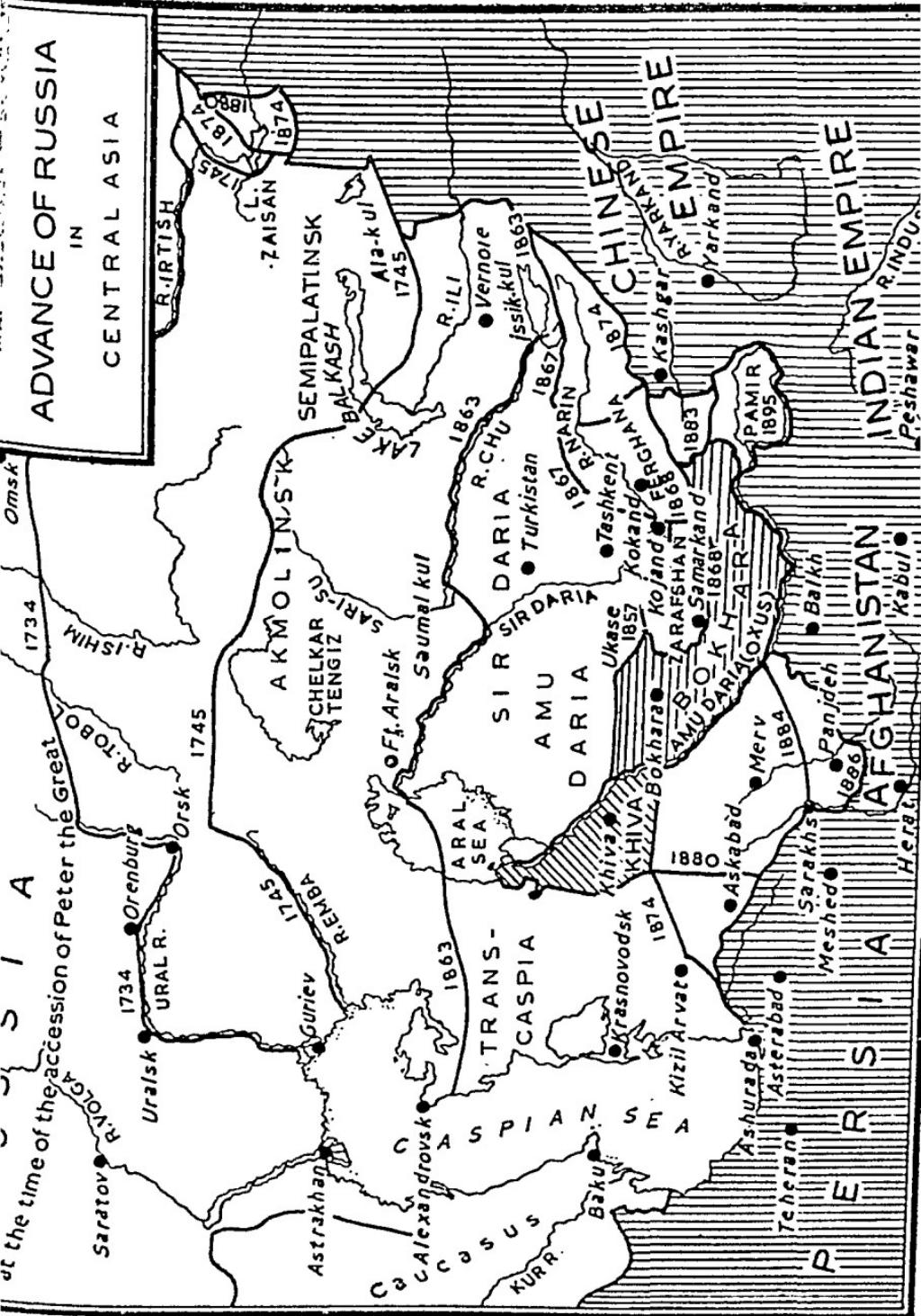
and Gurgaon chiefs and the whole of the Turkoman tribes between the Caspian sea, Merv and Charjoi, together with the friendship of the Yamut tribesmen.<sup>9</sup> Also, when the Tekke Turkomans failed to submit to Russian authority, energetic measures were adopted to pacify them, often in violation of the traditional Persian frontier.<sup>10</sup> It was evident from the secret intelligence available to the British Foreign Office, that the Russian government had no intention of remaining idle with regard to the development of its power in those countries. They had resolved to establish a strong base of operations in the delta of the Oxus, the importance of which, from a political point of view, was 'far greater than the annexation of Khiva or of any other province of Central Asia'.<sup>11</sup> The Ministry of Public Works had been instructed by the Emperor to prepare a project for the construction of a railway in Central Asia and it had been decided to unite the Aral and the Caspian seas by means of a military road ensuring a line of communication to the Caspian in addition to that then existing between the centre of Russia and Orenburg.<sup>12</sup> 'In other words,' as Wellesley wrote in his despatch, 'Russia in Central Asia is at present miserably weak, but she knows it and intends to be stronger.'<sup>13</sup> It was impossible to foretell to what extent the position of Russia in Central Asia might have been improved in the course of the next few years. Yet it was fairly reasonable to assume that with a strong base of operations in the delta of the Oxus and a direct line of communication to the Caucasus, the strength of Russia would 'render her the most formidable power in the close vicinity of our Eastern provinces'.<sup>14</sup> Further, it was believed that the Russian government had some notions of forming a separate state of the province of Herat, detached from the sovereignty of Afghanistan and in common understanding with Persia and Russia. If, however, the constitution of an independent state should be impracticable, it was feared that the Russians might seek to gain the entire support of Persia by holding out to the Shah the hopes of acquiring Herat as a

9. Loftus to Derby, 24 June 1874, No. 5, F.O. 539/10, p. 3.
10. Taylor Thomson to Derby, 19 June 1874, No. 9, F.O. 539/10, p. 6.
11. Derby to Loftus, 6 November 1874, No. 26, F.O. 539/10, p. 22; Loftus to Derby, 10 November 1876, No. 28, F.O. 539/10, p. 23.
12. 'Observations sur le Turkestan', papers received by Capt. Wellesley from the Russian Foreign Ministry, enclosure 2 in No. 82, F.O. 539/10, p. 147.
13. Wellesley to Loftus, 10 October 1874, CowP. 274; No. 82, enclosure 1 in F.O. 539/10.
14. Wellesley to Loftus, 12 October 1874, CowP. 274, No. 30, p. 130.

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ADVANCE OF RUSSIA



separate tributary under Abdul Rahman Khan, then enjoying the protection of the Russian government at Samarkand.<sup>15</sup> The unqualified approval by the Emperor<sup>16</sup> of such proposals as those of Michael had sinister implications, that led to misgivings in London. True, Schouvaloff, the Russian ambassador, might have been 'sincere in his profession of goodwill' but there were doubts as to 'his being initiated into the secrets of the military party, which had always been hostile to him and might carry the day in the end.'<sup>17</sup> In fact, London was uncertain as to the real authorship of Russian policy in Central Asia. It was probably Michael, and Salisbury, for one, was firmly convinced that the Grand Duke hoped to get his troops insulted so as to be forced to avenge the insult.<sup>18</sup> Derby was more afraid of the reactions of the Emperor.<sup>19</sup> In view of such misgivings and uncertainties the problem remained basically the same. It was to provide against 'whatever dangers,' to quote Loftus, 'may in the future menace our interests from Russian advance and aggression'.<sup>20</sup>

In fact, the official debate no longer concerned itself with the desirability of a firm stand against Russia. Instead its primary interests lay in the problems of where, by whom and how the Russians were to be checkmated. The British legation at Teheran had been pressing for a bold initiative in Persia. But it was far from practicable. Persia was 'weak, illgoverned, under the influence of a fanatical priesthood, without resources and defenceless',<sup>21</sup> and for good or evil the Persian question had been internationalised. Besides, there was the grim reality that from her geographical position Russia could have occupied Teheran long before any material assistance could be provided by Great Britain. In fact, she was a broken reed and there was a striking unanimity of opinion as to the futility of

15. *Ibid.*; Wellesley to Loftus, 17 October 1874, CowP. 274, No. 35, p. 35. Loftus to Derby, 16 September 1874, 28 October 1874, and 20 January 1875, Russia: Loftus, DerP.

16. Cf. the marginal notes by the Emperor in the 'Papers received by Capt. Wellesley', enclosure in No. 82, F.O. 539/10, pp. 147-54; Wellesley to Loftus, 12 October 1874, CowP. 274, No. 30, p. 130; Loftus to Derby 28 October 1874, Russia/Loftus, DerP.

17. Loftus to Derby, 14 October 1874, Russia/Loftus, DerP.

18. Salisbury to Derby, 15 March 1875, Cabinet/private/Salisbury, 1874-77, DerP.

19. Derby to Loftus, 7 October 1874, Private/To Russia (Drafts), 1874-78, DerP.

20. Loftus to Derby, 11 November 1874, Russia/Loftus, DerP.

21. Loftus to Derby, 17 October 1874, Russia/Loftus, DerP.

leaning on Persia and endeavouring to set her on her own feet.<sup>22</sup> The cost of any military intervention in her favour would be excessive, and the result of such an adventure merely speculative.

Nor was it deemed possible to open up a military front at Yarkand, the much publicised Eldorado of Eastern Turkistan. The conveyance of arms under a British escort had helped to prop up a strong Muslim power in that hitherto unimportant country.<sup>23</sup> But it had been sufficiently established that a regular line of communication for the use of wheeled traffic through the Karakoram was an idle dream.<sup>24</sup> The Chinese had massed their troops at Urumptchi and were expected soon to come into collision with the Dungans and the forces of Yakub Beg and there were reports that the Russians had decided to view the restoration of Chinese rule as less dangerous than the existing regime.<sup>25</sup> Would it not be desirable, argued Salisbury, to make a frank intimation to Russia that 'we have no wish to hinder her expansion to the Eastward' so as to induce the Emperor to send all his unquiet and dangerous spirits to the Yarkand frontier? 'It is an internal necessity of Russia to move on', Salisbury wrote, 'directly her frontier becomes fixed her political trouble begins. It is our part not to offer the slightest obstacle to her walking over other people's hedges, so long as those hedges do not lie in our direction'.<sup>26</sup> Lytton was to agree with him.<sup>27</sup> Naturally, by a process of elimination, Afghanistan and Khelat stood at the centre of British strategic thinking. So far as the Oxus line was concerned, it was felt that the agreement of 1873 was so definite that nothing remained to be done about it except to see that it was observed.<sup>28</sup> On the

22. *Ibid*; Derby to Loftus, 12 October 1874, Private/To Russia Drafts/1874-8, DerP.; Salisbury to Derby, 1 August 1874, 30 September, 1874 and 10 November, 1874, Private/Cabinet/From Salisbury 1874-7, DerP.

Disraeli to Derby, (undated), Private/Disraeli/Cabinet 1874-5, DerP.

23. Doria to Derby, 10 June 1874, No. 2, F.O. 539/10, p. 1; Loftus to Derby, 22 June 1874, No. 3, F.O. 539/10, p. 2.

24. For a comprehensive study of the strategic importance of the Karakoram and allied subjects, see 'Memorandum on Chitral including the frontier states of Gilgit and Yassin', Memorandum A. 18.

25. Robert Michell's 'Memorandum of Eastern Turkistan', part II, enclosure in No. 40, F.O. 539/10, pp. 85-90; also the Envoy, Yarkand Mission to the Secretary to the Government of India, Foreign Department 16 May 1874, enclosure in No. 45, para. 26, 28 and 27, p. 114. F.O. 538/10.

26. Salisbury to Lytton, 10 March 1876, SalP.

27. Lytton to Salisbury, 14 March 1867, LyP. 518/, p. 25.

28. Derby to Loftus, 7 October 1876, Private/Russia/Drafts/1874-8, DerP.

western front, however, things were different. The occupation of Atrek and Merv by Russian troops would have materially affected British relations with Persia and Afghanistan, and on these grounds it was considered inexpedient, if not impossible, for the British government to remain indifferent to Russian operations against the Turkomans.<sup>29</sup> It was argued that without entering into a treaty or a binding agreement a fresh discussion might be undertaken with Russia with a view to defining her territory in Asia. Russia had not yet claimed any right to conquest over the Turkomans and in official Russian documents they were frequently recognised as independent tribes. Thus it was felt that Russia could not take umbrage if asked to define her territory.<sup>30</sup>

A more controversial part of the official discussion developed around the immediate question of who was to take the initiative. There was much truth in the observations of the Indian establishment, which pointed at the expediency of accepting the inevitable growth of Russia in Central Asia. Hence, there was considerable justification in the arguments proposing the opening of a fresh dialogue with Russia with a view to fixing a definite boundary in those areas. The only objection to such a project, argued the Foreign Office, was a treaty of understanding 'which binds us and does not bind them'.<sup>31</sup> If there was no Russian desire for expansion in that direction the pledge would have been unnecessary, whilst if such a desire existed, the pledge would not have been given. There was the proved impossibility, argued Derby, of relying on Russian engagements, for, in the absence of public opinion in Russia, there was no social or political penalty for a breach of faith.<sup>32</sup> As far as promises were concerned, Derby held, 'we have got all that we can ask for.' Russia had promised three or four times not to send an expedition to Merv and to remain strictly on the defensive. 'They cannot pledge themselves more strongly than they have done', Derby reiterated, 'and to make fresh representation now with no fresh grounds to go upon, would only be showing distrust without obtaining

29. Hamilton to Tenterden, 21 June 1875, No. 58, F.O. 539/10, p. 54.

30. See Loftus to Derby, 16 September 1874 and 7 October 1874, Russia/  
Loftus, DerP.

31. Derby to Loftus, 8 September 1874, Private/Loftus/Drafts, 1874-78,  
DerP.

32. Derby to Loftus, 7 October 1874, Private/Loftus/Drafts, 1874-78,  
DerP.

additional security'.<sup>33</sup> On the contrary, Derby had no objection of any kind to the establishment of a British mission at Kabul provided it was felt that the man sent would not 'have a knife put into him'.<sup>34</sup> Derby seemed very cautious. 'Don't let him run after women as Burnes did—the Afghans don't like it,' he warned, 'and their irritation on that score cost us much...'.<sup>35</sup> Thus, to the Foreign Office it appeared that the Indian administration had difficulty in making up its mind on any definite policy regarding Herat and Kabul, and was afraid to send British officers for fear of getting mixed up in the disputes of the chiefs. As a way out, Derby complained, it naturally turned to the Foreign Office and wanted 'something done with Russia by us thus shifting for the moment the burden of responsibility off their own shoulders'.<sup>36</sup> At all events, the Foreign Office seemed determined not to allow the Home government to be led into future understandings without having a clear idea of 'what we want, what we mean to stick to and how we mean to enforce the maintenance of our position'.<sup>37</sup>

In line with the discussion at home, Salisbury sent frequent directives to the Indian government to revise their Afghan policy and make independent arrangements with a view to neutralising the inconvenience of an eventual advance upon Merv by Russia.<sup>38</sup> The means advocated were agencies at Kabul and Herat, financial assistance and a direct system of communication with the Kabul durbar. Salisbury's impression had always been that 'if you get a strong and independent Afghanistan, it would turn against you'.<sup>39</sup> He had serious misgivings as to the wisdom of making the friendliness of the Amir the pivot of British policy.<sup>40</sup> 'If with our help he subdues rebels and accumulates warlike stores and fills his treasury', he wrote, 'and drills his people, perhaps someday he may fancy without our

- 33. Derby to Loftus, 3 March 1874, Secret/Salisbury/Drafts, 1864-77, DerP.
- 34. Derby to Salisbury, 15 November 1874, Secret/Salisbury/Drafts, 1874-77, DerP.
- 35. *Ibid.*
- 36. Tenterden's 'Memorandum on Salisbury's Letter of 30 September, 1874', 30 September 1874, Private/F.O. officials/1874-78, DerP.
- 37. *Ibid.*
- 38. Cf. the following despatches : Secretary of State to the Government of India, 22 January 1874, P.P. LVI (1878-9), p. 11; Secretary of State to the Government of India, 19 November 1875, P.P. LVI (1878-9), p. 45.
- 39. Salisbury to Northbrook, 10 June 1874, N.P./11.
- 40. *Ibid.*

motive for what is impolitic. But the more inactive we are now the more we increase the danger of panic'.<sup>48</sup> In short, Salisbury was determined not to leave the 'key to the gate of India' in the hands of a warden of 'no more than doubtful integrity',<sup>49</sup> who insisted as an indispensable condition of service that 'his movements shall not be observed'.<sup>50</sup>

Northbrook, on the contrary, chose to view the Afghan problem differently and for more than a year sternly resisted the Home government. In his official despatch<sup>51</sup> he tried to convince the Secretary of State that the Amir was as friendly to the Indian government as ever and that his apparent disposition to take offence had been 'put on either on the chance of getting more from us or perhaps to conciliate the fanatical party'.<sup>52</sup> In his private correspondence, however, Northbrook appeared to be more realistic. 'We have treated the Amir', he wrote, 'with great patience and I am not prepared to continue to do all he asks, while he shows his suspicion almost offensively and makes excuses for refusing what we have a reasonable ground for expecting him to do'.<sup>53</sup> By 1874 Northbrook was to confess that Salisbury's views on the British position with regard to Afghanistan 'quite coincide with mine' and that the Amir's churlishness about Ibrahim Khan's journey to Wakhan, coupled with his treachery to Yakub Khan, had necessarily 'very much weakened the cordiality of our relations with him'.<sup>54</sup> And yet in his official correspondence he retained his dogged opposition to the idea of a British resident. The reason is not difficult to conjecture. Northbrook was convinced that London intended to lay the foundation of a change of policy in British relations with Afghanistan and possibly also with Khelat and other neighbouring states.<sup>55</sup> He was not agreeable to the idea that the Afghan relations might be used to solve the Mervian complications.<sup>56</sup> Hence, under his directions, the Indian

48. Salisbury to Northbrook, 14 January 1876, N.P./13.

49. Salisbury to Northbrook, 23 April 1875, N.P./12.

50. *Ibid.*

51. See Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 7 June 1875, P.P. LV (1878-9), p. 11; and Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 28 February 1876, P.P. LV (1878-9), p. 45.

52. Northbrook to Salisbury, 16 June 1874, N.P./10.

53. Northbrook to Salisbury, 8 September 1874, N.P./10.

54. Northbrook to Salisbury, 4 December 1874, N.P./10.

55. Northbrook to Salisbury, 17 December 1875, N.P./11.

56. Northbrook to Salisbury, 30 September 1875, N.P./11.

Davies to Northbrook, 28 December 1875, N.P./17. Also see R.H.

administration decided to hold the view that the Amir did not want closer relations. Acting on this assumption Aitchison noted : 'We must either swallow the orders and risk everything or we must refuse it. My voice would be against sending any mission to Kabul whatever at present'.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, it was held that although it was impossible to ascertain the motives of the Afghans and their politics, no one in India who had any knowledge of Afghan affairs took the same view that Salisbury had done of Sher Ali or agreed with the views expressed in the despatches of the India Office.<sup>58</sup> Northbrook's main thesis was that the Amir could have reasonable grounds for objecting to receiving British officers as residents in Afghanistan and yet at the same time 'be loyal to us', and that if he refused he must not necessarily be guided by some sinister motives.<sup>59</sup> Thus, he insisted that the British ought to trust the Amir, that the Amir would turn to the Indian government if and when threatened, that his savage pride in his independence was a reliable cushion against Russian interference, and, finally, that even a British officer posted at Herat would not be able to seek information along the line of four hundred miles from Herat to Balkh.<sup>60</sup> In fact, Northbrook was quite apt to appreciate the advantages of a British resident posted at Herat if only upon the cordial concurrence of the Amir.<sup>61</sup> 'By taking the initiative', he advised, 'I feel certain you are throwing away your best cards and running the risk of great embarrassments for the future, both political and financial'.<sup>62</sup>

The controversy over the proposed Kabul mission continued until February 1876, when Salisbury concluded that it was hardly fair to ask Northbrook to take any step in the matter when he so doubted the soundness of the policy.<sup>63</sup> On the contrary, it was expected that Lytton, the Viceroy-designate, who had talked much on the matter with Salisbury and who could seize his 'exact meaning and design', was to bring a fresh approach to the whole question.<sup>64</sup>

57. C.U. Aitchison to Northbrook, 17 December 1875, N.P./17.

58. Northbrook to Salisbury, 11 February 1876, N.P./12. Cf. Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 28 February 1876, P.P. LV (1878-9), p. 45.

59. Northbrook to Salisbury, 25 February 1876, N.P./12.

60. Cf. Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 28 February 1876, P.P. LV (1878-9), p. 45.

61. Northbrook to Salisbury, 4 March 1875, N.P./12.

62. Northbrook to Salisbury, 11 February 1876, N.P./12.

63. Salisbury to Northbrook, 5 February 1876, N.P./12.

64. Salisbury to Northbrook, 25 February 1876, N.P./12.

Indeed, Lytton took his charge seriously. 'Dizzy's letter' had led him to study Rawlinson on his way to London from his diplomatic assignment at Lisbon.<sup>65</sup> The Prime Minister had made it clear that Afghanistan and frontier administration would form Lytton's chief concern in India.<sup>66</sup> In London, Lytton conferred with the pundits of the India Office. He was allowed to draw up a despatch covering the different aspects of the proposed Central Asian policy and Salisbury did not hesitate to put his signature to it.<sup>67</sup> O.T. Burne,<sup>68</sup> once the private secretary of the energetic Mayo, was relieved by the India Office to accompany him. Pelly was soon to join his entourage.<sup>69</sup> At Aden, Frere handed his 'memo' over to the Viceroy<sup>70</sup> advocating the application of the Sind tradition in trans-frontier administration.<sup>71</sup> Immediately upon his arrival in Bombay Lytton sent an urgent

65. Lytton to Rawlinson, 24 February 1876, LyP (H).
66. Disraeli to Lytton, undated 1876, LyP (H).
67. Secretary of State for India to the Government of India, 28 February 1876, P.P. LV (1878-9), p. 45.
68. Burne, Sir Owen Tudor, joined the 20th East Devonshire regiment in 1857; sent to India with his regiment in 1857; noted for conspicuous services during the uprising in Lucknow-Banaras area; lieutenant in 1858; appointed military secretary in 1861; resigned in 1862 to become private secretary to Sir Hugh Ross, the C-in-C. in India; went to Ireland as an aide-de-camp to Sir Hugh, 1868; returned to India as the private secretary to Mayo; returned upon the Viceroy's assassination in 1872; political aide-de-camp to the Indian Secretary of State, 1872-4; assistant-secretary to the Political and Secret Department of the India office; promoted to the office of the secretary of the department in October, 1874; private secretary to Lord Lytton, April 1876—January 1878; returned to the India office in 1878; joined the India Council in 1886, retiring in 1896.
69. Pelly, Sir Lewis, (1825-92) Indian official; Lieutenant general, 1887; assistant resident at Baroda, 1851-2; served in Persian war, 1857; secretary to the legation at Teheran; political agent and consul at Zanzibar, 1861-2; agent on the Persian Gulf 1871-2; despatched as the commissioner to Baroda, was sent to Peshawar as envoy extraordinary, 1877; K.C.B., 1877; returned to England, 1878; conservative M.P., 1885-92.
70. 'Memorandum on the administration of Sind and Punjab frontiers' by B. Frere, undated 1876, LyP. 520/1; also Frere to Salisbury, 14 February 1876, LyP. 521/2.
71. The arguments of Frere were as follows: In the Punjab frontier the tribes were mostly independent but many acknowledged some sort of nominal subordination to the ruler of Kabul. The policy of the Punjab authorities had been to treat them as buffer by a system of armed truce. On the Sind frontier, on the other hand, tribes were defined as the subjects of the Khan of Khelat whose authority over them was never denied, but actually recognised as such.

request to Northbrook to suspend Sandeman's mission to Khelat.<sup>72</sup> 'I attribute', Lytton wrote, 'all our present difficulties in Khelat to his [Northbrook's] attempt to foist the Punjab policy upon Sind as an Imperial policy—which it is not and never can be'.<sup>73</sup> It was self-evident that Lytton meant action. But the course of action was no longer to be dictated by local issues. 'Potentates such as the Khan of Khelat or the Ameer of Kabul', he wrote, 'are more dummies or counters which can be of no importance to us were it not for the costly stakes we put upon them in the great game for Empire we are playing with Russia'.<sup>74</sup> In his opinion there was no longer such a thing as the Khelat question or an Afghan question. Those were only departments of the Great Russian Question and, henceforth, were to be treated accordingly.<sup>75</sup>

Lytton shared with Salisbury the conviction that the available military force of Russia in Central Asia was not formidable.<sup>76</sup> But unlike Derby he drew little comfort from such an apparently satisfactory position. On the contrary, he was fully aware of the basic conflict of interests between Britain and Russia in the East. 'No state has ever, so far as I know, been prevented from going to war for want of funds', he wrote, 'when the sentiment of the whole population has been bellicose on behalf of some abstract idea of national ambition'.<sup>77</sup> The same reason which had made France dread contact with a united Germany, Lytton asserted, 'must also make us dread contact with Russia in Central Asia'.<sup>78</sup> It was difficult to doubt the judgement of the Viceroy in view of the growing restlessness of Russia in Central Asia, the annoyance and truculence of the Afghans, and the uncertainty of the Khelat frontier. As a corrective to the situation Lytton decided to discard Lawrence's policy altogether.<sup>79</sup> The policy which had hitherto been followed with regard to the Afghan alliance, had hinged primarily on the conviction that the existing frontier was militarily a sound line, that it was possible as well as desirable to make Afghanistan a permanent barrier between India and Russia and that the alliance with

72. Lytton to Northbrook, undated, LyP. 518/1.

73. Lytton to Salisbury, 29 September 1876, SalP.

74. Lytton to Salisbury, 29 September 1876, LyP. 518/1.

75. Lytton to Rawlinson, 5 August 1876, LyP. 518/1.

76. Lytton to Salisbury, 21 May 1877, SalP.

77. Lytton to Cranbrook, 3 July 1877, (Private and Confidential), CranP.

78. *Ibid.* Lytton to Salisbury, 21 May 1877, SalP.

79. 'Minute' by Lytton, 6 May 1876, f. 34, LyP. 8.

Afghanistan could best be secured by a policy of abstention. Lytton, on the other hand, held that the existing line was militarily weak and faulty, that it was impossible to retain an independent barbarous state between two civilised powers and that passiveness was not the way to acquire influence over 'semi-savage' states.<sup>80</sup> Had that policy achieved its objects in the management of the Amir the Viceroy would have had no scruples in advocating it.<sup>81</sup> The primary object of an Afghan policy, as Lytton saw it, ought to be the cooperation of the Amir 'with us in any war with Russia'.<sup>82</sup> Judged by that standard, Lytton found the existing policy wanting both in a sense of purpose and in a decisive initiative. In fact, the real difficulty of the policy lay not so much in the want of a resident, but in the want of a policy. The government had nothing definite to say or was not prepared to say the only thing which would have been worth saying about the Russians and their proceedings.<sup>83</sup> 'I am pretty certain', Lytton wrote, 'that the Ameer, if not actually against us, would not be even passively with us in any war with Russia and without his acquiescence we cannot attempt to strike a deadly blow at Russia'.<sup>84</sup> The actual reasons which had kept the British frontier stationary for thirty years, he argued, were the difficulties of subduing the wild mountain tribes in a rugged country, the unreasoning panic resulting from the blunders of the Kabul campaigns and finally the fact that the victims of the hill tribes were 'poor devils of natives and not Englishmen as in America or our colonies'.<sup>85</sup> The concept of an intermediary zone in the context of Central Asia had become a convenient piece of diplomatic jargon. The Russian Press had been fairly unequivocal about its impracticability since the Khivan operation.<sup>86</sup> Their diplomats had made no bones about the advantages of an adjacent frontier in Asia.<sup>87</sup> In fact, the confidential proposals made by Schouvaloff, just before Lytton left Britain, for a joint partition of Afghanistan,<sup>88</sup> had appealed to the poetic

80. *Ibid.*

81. *Ibid.* Lytton to H. Loch, 25 November 1878, LyP (H); Lytton to Cranbrook, 3 July 1878, CranP.

82. *Ibid.* James Fitzjames Stephen to Lytton, 8 May 1876, SteP. Box III.

84. Lytton to Loch, 25 November 1878, LyP. (H).

85. 'Minute' by Lytton, 6 May 1876, f. 35, LyP. 8.

86. Loftus to Derby, 15 June 1874, No. 132, F.O. 539/10.

87. For example, Schouvaloff's views as expressed in Loftus to Derby,

(No.103 Confidential) No. 49, 30 March 1875, F.O. 539/10.

88. Lytton to H. Loch, 25 November 1878, LyP. (H); Salisbury to Derby, 12 January 1876, Private/Cabinet/From Salisbury 1874-7, DerP.

imagination of the Viceroy. He saw in it a practical solution to the tangled question. 'I agree with you,' wrote a friend of his, 'that to ask the Russians to stop in their advance is like asking water to stop at a certain point on its way downhill and to ask a barbarian country between two civilised nations to retain its independence is like asking an egg to stand on its end'.<sup>89</sup> Acting on this premise, Lytton assumed it as a certainty that Afghanistan would sooner or later be absorbed by, or come under the influence of, one or the other of her neighbours. Hence, the all important question to him was which of the two great neighbours was to exercise the 'necessary and unavoidable control over Afghanistan'.<sup>90</sup> Granted that British influence must be paramount, Lytton put it bluntly, 'I know of only two ways in which such influence can be gained : the first and the rudest is by conquest as we have established ourselves over most of India and as Russia has established herself in the Khanates ; the second is by friendly intervention, agents and treaties'.<sup>91</sup> If, however, the second alternative failed, Lytton would consider it necessary to attack Afghanistan and establish influence by force of arms.<sup>92</sup> The matter could not be left unsettled. The eventual line of contact was to be fixed by the British while they were still in a position to choose and it ought to be a strong military line.<sup>93</sup> Such a frontier was not to be achieved by any diplomatic remonstrance with Russia. In fact, Lytton did not attach 'a magical value to the talisman of diplomatic remonstrance from London'.<sup>94</sup> Whether or

89. Stephen to Lytton, 1 June 1876, SteP. Box III.

90. Lytton to Salisbury, 21 May 1877, SalP; confidential note by Lytton, undated 1876, LyP. 7.

91. 'Minute' by Lytton, 6 May 1876, f. 36, LyP. 87. 'The loose groups of barbarous states outside the frontier may be compared', Lytton wrote, 'with the fresh air necessary for life. But the space is strictly limited : if it be obstructed altogether we cease to breathe, we perish'. Lytton to Salisbury, 21 May 1877, SalP.

92. Lytton to Cranbrook, 3 July 1878, CranP.

93. Lytton to the Prince of Wales, 30 June 1876, LyP. 518/1.

94. Lytton to Salisbury, 1 August 1877, LyP. 518/3. Lytton wrote profusely on the scientific frontier. See, for example, 'Minutes' and 'Notes' in LyP. 7, 8 and 10. Besides Lytton's letters to the Secretary of State for India in LyP. 518/3, also see Lytton to Stephen, 30 July 1877, SteP. Box III; Lytton to Morely, undated, LyP. 519/3; Lytton to Loch, 25 November 1878, LyP. (H). In the margin of his letter to Loch, Lytton wrote : 'Most valuable summary of Afghan and frontier policy'. The minutes and memoranda prepared by Colley are missing from the private

not it was possible to come to a satisfactory understanding with Russia over Central Asia, the problem which concerned Lytton was the acquisition of an advanced position in Kandahar, Herat and Balkh etc. The frontier thus envisaged was justified on the grounds of the inadequacies of the natural frontier in the context of modern warfare, and the necessities of having full control of the mountain passes and the glacis beyond.<sup>95</sup> In defence of that frontier Lytton wrote : 'What gives the fortresses of Coblenz and Mainz exceptional value but that they command both sides of a great natural obstacle, the Rhine ? What gave the celebrated Quadrilateral its strength but that its fortress gave its holder the power of operating on either side at will ? What constitutes the value of Nice and Savoy to France, but that their possession turns an unfavourable boundary line into a favourable one by giving France command of the mountain passes ? That the mountain line is a strong line to him who holds the passes and debouches and a dangerous snare to him who does not, is an elementary military axiom'.<sup>96</sup> Lytton believed that India had the strongest geographical barriers provided 'we had the command of the external debouches of our great mountain barriers which we do not possess now but which we are determined to possess at any cost'.<sup>97</sup>

It is difficult to overlook the distinctly anti-Russian overtone in Lytton's project. 'Indian Russophobia', he wrote, 'seems to me the natural result of a patent contradiction between theory and fact—between the teachings of Lawrence's school and the teachings of Experience...and if we knew Central Asia to be cleared of Russian soldiers the Russophiles as well as the Russophobes would breathe more freely'.<sup>98</sup> In fact, in line with his Central Asian scheme, he

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papers of Lytton, although they are entered in the indices of the bound volumes of Lytton papers in the India Office Library. (For example, See LyP. 519/2) Only one remains. This is 'Note on Khelat' by Colley, 1876, LyP. 519/4, No. 139. The arguments of this paper are in line with those of Lytton to Loch 25 November 1878, LyP. (H). It may also be recorded here that Sir John Strachey handed over to Lady Balfour, Lytton's daughter and official biographer, six volumes of letters from Lytton (Strachey to Balfour, 1 December 1891, LyP. 519/2). These are not to be found in the Lytton papers either in the India Office or in the Hertfordshire country Archive.

95. Lytton to Salisbury, 17 May 1877, SalP.

96. 'Minute' by Lytton, 6 May 1876, f 35, LyP. 8.

97. Lytton to Salisbury, 21 May 1877, SalP.

98. Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 July 1877, LayP. Add. 39164, p. 49.

drafted a well thought out pattern for British foreign policy. He assumed that the foreign policy of any state must always be dictated by 'the interests, the fears and the hopes of the country' it represented. Thus he took it for granted that the only firm and fruitful alliances were those which were founded on common interests and that alliances based on mutual fears were invariably treacherous in the long run. Working on these assumptions, he concluded that British interests were peaceful and commercial and that the natural enemies of every great commercial power were not, as formerly in the days of the 'infancy of trade', its commercial rivals, but the semi-civilised and purely militarised states. The only fear that the British politicians were to encounter, according to Lytton, was the loss of assured communication with her Indian Empire or a weakening of its Asian frontier which, as he put it, 'unfortunately no sane man can at present regard as a safe one'; and secondly, the loss of maritime supremacy or a weakening of it in any particular sea which then constituted her greatest highway. On the basis of such an assumption, it was not difficult to conclude that the one power which seemed to threaten British interests from Constantinople to Kashmir was Russia and that the consolidation of British power at a few key points like Constantinople, Crete and Suez, the Persian Gulf and Quetta was not sufficient to ensure the final and complete defeat of Russia.<sup>99</sup> Under his inspiration, Temple wrote profusely on the interests of Bombay in Mesopotamia and the Euphrates, sometimes even to the embarrassment of Lytton himself.<sup>100</sup> The Viceroy never failed to integrate the interests of Turkey and those of the Indian Empire<sup>101</sup> and to emphasise the need to resist Russian encroach-

99. *Ibid.* Also see Lytton to Salisbury, 5 April 1877, SalP; Lytton to R. Strachey, 18 November 1879, StrP; Lytton to Stephen, 24 June 1877, SteP. Box I; Lytton to Stephen 17 July 1877, SteP. Box I; Lytton to Stephen, 23 August 1878, SteP. Box I; Burne to Pelly, 2 August 1877, PelP.

100. See for example, Temple to Lytton, undated November, 1877; Temple to Lytton, 12 July 1877, all in Temp. 6. Temple to Salisbury, 11 February 1878; Temple to Salisbury, 16 February 1878; Temple to Salisbury, 11 March 1878; Temple to Salisbury, 7 April 1878, all in Temp. 7.

101. 'If the Home Government', wrote Lytton, 'were not determined to act regardless of the fact that England in India and through India, throughout Asia, is a great Mahomedan power and that the support and sympathy of our Mahomedans is a great strength, their alienation and mistrust a great weakness to us, it is obvious that at the present moment constant frank communication and cordial co-operation between me and Layard,

ments in the Near East.<sup>102</sup> In 1876 he drew up, on an enquiry from Salisbury, a detailed plan of operation against Russia through the territory of the Amir and even made extensive preparations on the frontier for immediate mobilisation,<sup>103</sup> which was stopped only by the timely intervention of the India Office.<sup>104</sup> In 1877 he attempted to strike panic into the hearts of what he thought was a Russophile Cabinet, by overplaying the dangers inherent in Lasarov's campaigns. As a remedy, he advanced his scheme for opening an unofficial war with Russia through the Turkomans, assisted by British arms, money and officials. The Merv despatch as it was known in the official and semi-official correspondence, was prompted by the occupation by the Russians of Kizzil Arvat. The occupation of this place, it was maintained, having brought the Russian within 500 miles of Herat, the next move would entail dominion over Afghanistan. This would compel the abandonment of Peshawar, to

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who is the only man in our diplomacy that really understands the East, might be most valuable. The determination of the Cabinet to prevent this is very unfortunate'. Lytton to Stephen, 17 July 1877, SteP. Box I.

102. Lytton to Salisbury, 29 September 1876, SalP.
103. The details of the plan of operations were decided at a meeting at Peshawar on the 30 November 1876 with the Viceroy, General Roberts, Lumsden, Cavagnari, MacNab and Major Bradford in attendance. Norman had been in favour of sending a force of 5,000 men at once and his scheme depended on the friendly co-operation of Afghanistan. Although it was very inexpensive, convenient and efficient the assumption was felt to be faulty. Besides, such war measures would have affected adversely the negotiations at Constantinople. It was on these grounds that Norman's suggestions were vetoed and in its place it was concluded that if war were declared the measures 'we should then have to take in reference to Cabul whether for the encouragement of a willing, the decision of a wavering or the punishment of a faithless ally would be substantially the same'. This necessitated the immediate massing of troops at the most convenient posts, attempts to win over the confidence of the Wazeeris, repairing the road from Kohat to Thal, reinforcement of Quetta, strengthening the communication from Kohat and Rawalpindi, construction of a pontoon bridge etc. Lytton to Salisbury, 30 November 1876, SalP.; Lytton to Henry Norman, 5 January 1877 and 21 January 1877, LyP. 518/2; Lytton to Carnarvon, 11 January 1877, and 21 January 1877, LyP. 518/2; Lytton to Salisbury, 11 January 1877, LyP. 518/2; Carnarvon to Lytton, 27 December 1876, CarnavP. 15.
104. *Ibid*; also see Cowling, 'Lytton, the Cabinet, and the Russian, p. 59. August to November 1878', *English Historical Journal*, LXXVI, (1961)

be followed by the abandonment of all the passes, retreat to the line of the Indus and finally British evacuation of India. Hence, Lytton proposed that further protests to St. Petersburg being useless, the way to meet this would be by a prompt announcement that 'England will regard the next step in advance as a *casus belli*'. Failing this it was recommended to assure Persia adequate support in opposing Russian advances in the direction of Merv, to send British officers to Merv to assist the Turkomans against the Russians and to be prepared to take political and military measures to prevent Russia obtaining a footing or even a dominant moral influence in Afghanistan.<sup>105</sup> In fact, Lytton and his associates anticipated all through the seventies a popular war with Russia,<sup>106</sup> and, in the face of a reluctant Cabinet, worked and intrigued to bring it about. In London, Burne, having returned from India, subsidised the influential Press and journals with a view to publicising the Indian case,<sup>107</sup> released secret documents to influential men outside the government,<sup>108</sup> and wrote 'blood and thunder' memoranda,<sup>109</sup> which Cranbrook, 'the Granny...not a bad fellow but rather dull',<sup>110</sup> forwarded to the Foreign Office for the consumption of Salisbury, 'evidently a man of big words and timid acts'.<sup>111</sup> Lytton advanced liberal grants to keep the intrigues going,<sup>112</sup> and, if reprimanded for acts of impropriety, made special efforts to ensure secrecy.<sup>113</sup> In Constantinople Layard worked in close contact with Lytton and even arranged a Turkish mission to Afghanistan over the head of the Foreign Office.<sup>114</sup> In India Lytton

105. Cf. Government of India to the Secretary of State for India, 2 July 1877, SIM 15, paras 44, 45 and 46. Also see Lytton to Stephen, 24 June 1877, SteP. Box I.

106. Cf. Lytton to Layard, 2 June 1877, LayP. Add. 38969; Stephen to Lytton, 21 April 1877, SteP. Box I; O.T. Burne to Lytton, 19 July LayP. 518/2.

107. Burne to Lytton, 16 August 1878, LayP. 518/6, No. 39.

108. For example, the substance of the Merv despatch was communicated to the *Daily Express*. Copies of the same despatch were privately forwarded to Rawlinson. Lytton to Bayley, 4 September 1877 LayP. 518/6, No. 36.

109. Burne to Lytton, 8 August 1878, LayP. 518/6, No. 34.

110. Burne to Lytton, 11 October 1878, LayP. 518/6, No. 84.

111. *Ibid.*

112. Burne to Lytton, 16 August 1878, LayP. 518/6, No. 39.

113. Lytton to Bayley, 4 September 1877, LayP. 518/6, No. 39.

114. Lytton to Stephen, 30 September 1877, SteP. Box III. For the Turkish mission see LayP. Add. 39164; also D.P. Singhal, 'India and Afghanistan', Queensland, 1963, pp. 24-30.

decided to follow his own course and to provide the Home government with 'accomplished facts'<sup>115</sup> which, as Burne assured him, if united to 'a fair modicum of success the veriest old women—a breed very much in the increase here—applaud'.<sup>116</sup>

The first phase of the Afghan drama, however, moved smoothly. There was complete confidence and coordination between the two governments. Realising the importance of the matter, the Home government had its directive presented to Lytton personally on the eve of his departure from London.<sup>117</sup> In that document, it was set out that the Afghan policy and the frontier administration was to be viewed as an imperial concern, that measures were to be adopted to co-ordinate the entire trans-frontier policy of the Government of India from Ladakh and Kashmir to the Persian Gulf in accordance with the exigencies of imperial objectives and that in Afghanistan positive steps were to be taken to win the ruler's co-operation. As a necessary *quid pro quo* all the demands of the Amir as expressed in 1869, 1873 and subsequently, were to be largely conceded. The new policy was to be marked by the establishment of British residents in Afghanistan, and the Amir's refusal to accept residents was to be viewed as incompatible with his professed goodwill.<sup>118</sup> As evidence of Salisbury's disposition it may be pointed out that Sher Ali's extension of his direct rule over Maimena was viewed by him as an open demonstration of hostility.<sup>119</sup> Thus, if the mission was not accepted, Lytton was authorised to adopt measures independent of the Amir. 'Sher Ali must understand', he reiterated, 'that either he is our friend or he must endure all the consequences inside and outside his frontier, of our enmity'. In such a contingency Lytton was authorised to find a successor to the Amir.<sup>120</sup>

115. 'I cannot prevent the English Government from swallowing', wrote Lytton in disgust, 'as many hogshead of dirt as its stomach will stand, but as for withdrawing our troops from Quetta—I will see them hanged first. If they want that done they must send someone else to do it for them'. Lytton to Stephen, 24 June 1877, SteP. Box. 1.

116. Burne to Lytton 19 July 1878, LyP. 518/6.

117. Secretary o. State to the Government of India, 28 February 1876, P.P., LV (1878-79), pp. 156-59.

118. Secretary of State to the Goverment of India, 19 November 1875, P.P., LV, (1878-79), p. 148.

119. *Ibid.*

120. Salisbury to Lytton, 7 July 1876, SalP.

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119. *Ibid.*

120. Salisbury to Lytton, 7 July 1876, SaIP.

Thus Lytton was allowed considerable discretion to keep foreign policy exclusively in his hands.<sup>121</sup> On reaching India Lytton found that a belief was prevalent in India, especially in his Council, that it was useless for the Government of India to have a foreign policy on any question which might affect relations with Russia, because it would not be supported efficiently at home.<sup>122</sup> It had led to a 'stupid notion' that since Britain must automatically make it a *casus belli* if Russia attacked Afghanistan, the Indian government need do nothing towards preventing the possibility of such an attack. The issue would in any case be fought out elsewhere—in the Black Sea or the Baltic.<sup>123</sup> On Salisbury's sympathetic approval,<sup>124</sup> Lytton set out to allay such misgivings. 'The gist of all I say to the Calcutta sages is this : if we do our duty here', Lytton reported to his chief, 'I promise you the present government will do its duty at home. But it is for you to begin, for we are on the spot and the first responsibility is ours'.<sup>125</sup> Immediately upon his assumption of office the Viceroy complained of the second-rate men about him, of Hobhouse, 'the sharpest of them all, but not a wise man, nor a...safe councillor', of Muir, a 'treacherous fool',<sup>126</sup> of Thornton, with whom Northbrook had saddled him in the foreign department, 'a scrumbly little man and not sufficiently well-bred for his present post', but 'whom I can't get rid of'.<sup>127</sup> In short, he felt considerable difficulty in the face of the 'powerful official prejudices and traditions' of an 'overrated' civil service, accustomed to 'look at everything from a small, local and often purely personal point of view'.<sup>128</sup> Salisbury sympathised with his representative in India and even advanced suggestions<sup>129</sup> and means to purge the Council of incompetence.<sup>130</sup> The new policy demanded absolute secrecy, but it was difficult to ensure it as Lytton was expected to take his Councillors' opinions for all official despatches. To avoid all unnecessary complications, however,

121. Salisbury to Lytton, 19 July 1876, SalP.

122. Lytton to Salisbury, 14 April 1876, SalP.

123. Lytton to Salisbury, 27 April 1876, SalP.

124. Salisbury to Lytton, 6 August 1876, SalP.

125. Lytton to Salisbury, 17 April 1876, SalP.

126. Lytton to Morley, 26 June 1876, LyP. 522/15.

127. Lytton to Salisbury, 14 April 1876, SalP.

128. Lytton to Morley, 26 June 1876, LyP. 522/15.

129. Salisbury to Lytton, 13 March 1876, SalP.

130. *Ibid.*

Salisbury had advised him that 'most arrangements could be managed demi-officially'.<sup>131</sup> Lytton was not slow to take the hint and there followed a long and extensive private correspondence between them, most of which never found its way into the Indian Office records. In fact, there was no indication of any rift and Lytton was to write jubilantly to his friend in London : 'In spite of all the nonsense which Mr. Courtney has set the English press talking about, and which is re-echoed here, about the tyranny of the Secretary of State, my own experience thus far leaves me under a strong impression that the only obstructive tyranny which the Viceroy has to fear is that of his own Council'.<sup>132</sup>

It would be interesting to examine the lengths to which Salisbury was willing to proceed with Lytton. As regards Lytton's views on the partition of Central Asia with Russia, Salisbury had complete satisfaction at least in so far as his 'opportunity of judging from London enabled him to express an opinion'. Of course, no frontier was absolutely impregnable ; but Lytton's sketch from the north-western end of Kashmir to Merv, appeared to Salisbury 'as strong as any frontier will or can be'.<sup>133</sup> It could only be pierced, he added, either by reducing the Russian army to the punitive and ill-provided condition of hordes or by an expenditure which would require a very much more robust exchequer than the Russians could afford. As Lytton proceeded to send a mission to Kabul, Salisbury encouraged his proceedings. 'I think you are right in your policy to Shere Ali', he wrote. 'His real feelings and motives are a mystery and it is of course quite possible that such feeling may leave us groping for our way in the dark and we may be somewhat roughly stopped by an obstacle we did not expect'.<sup>134</sup> Such a liability, he emphasised, could not be allowed to hang over the proceedings of a court whose actions were becoming 'every year of more supreme importance to us'.<sup>135</sup> In the spring of 1876 when the temper of European diplomacy was tense, and a showdown with Russia was expected, Lytton drew up under Salisbury's recommendations a plan for a Central Asian Expedition and steps were even taken towards a general mobilisation.<sup>136</sup> The occupation of Quetta was obviously

131. Salisbury to Lytton, 19 July 1876, SalP.

132. Lytton to Morley, 16 June 1876, LyP. 522/15.

133. Salisbury to Lytton, 24 March 1876, SalP.

134. Salisbury to Lytton, 7 July 1876, SalP.

135. *Ibid.*

136. See note 102 of the present chapter.

undertaken with Salisbury's approval.<sup>137</sup> He had also sanctioned Lytton's plan for the frontier administration to be put under the direct orders of the Viceroy.<sup>138</sup> When Lytton failed to communicate to the Secretary of State the content of the first letter to the Amir, Salisbury excused this official lapse. 'I think' he wrote, 'your discretion was probably sound in not sending me the text of the letter. I could have offered no useful criticisms upon it.... You do not address advice to a billiard player at the moment he is about to strike'.<sup>139</sup> The Viceroy reciprocated spontaneously: 'I am sincerely grateful for the valuable credit you have opened to my account at the Bank of Good Fortune, your helpful confidence, and I will not abuse it'.<sup>140</sup> Nor did the Secretary of State fail to consent to the explorations and secret agents which formed an important accessory of Lytton's diplomacy. Of course, explorations were hazardous. But one could on no account, Salisbury argued, 'go on without charts'.<sup>141</sup> Accordingly, both Salisbury and Lytton were unanimous in upholding the right of a Briton to get his throat cut when and where he liked except upon his immediate frontier.<sup>142</sup> In short, there was no lack of official encouragement. In the Commons, Salisbury maintained that the Afghan policy had not altered in any substantial sense. But he did not hesitate in his private correspondence to emphasise the superficial character of his public utterances.<sup>143</sup> It is apparent from Lytton's private correspondence that he could seldom resist the temptation to dramatise situations, often giving rise to legitimate apprehensions. Burne, his private secretary, spent his whole time on the alert to keep his writing 'less and shorter' and found it 'not an easy task'.<sup>144</sup> The members of the India Council, however, had periodical spells of alarm. Lytton grumbled, while Salisbury missed no opportunity to

137. Salisbury to Lytton, 14 December 1877, SalP.

138. Salisbury to Lytton, 5 May 1876, No. 16, LyP. 516/1.

139. Salisbury to Lytton, 7 July 1876, SalP.

140. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 August 1876, SalP.

141. Salisbury to Lytton, 7 July 1876, SalP.

142. Salisbury to Lytton, 19 May 1876, LyP. 506/1.

143. 'I hope, you will remember that sedatives are absolutely necessary if any action is to be carried through at all. Some of my language was intended for the public here and not for the Ameer of Afghanistan—I hope it may fail to reach him. It is very embarrassing to have several different audiences—requiring diverse if not antagonistic treatment'. Salisbury to Lytton, 3 July 1877, SalP.

144. Burne to Pelly, 2 August 1877, PelP.

have Lytton's men enrolled in the Council.<sup>145</sup> Thus the concord between the Chief and the Viceroy survived the initial anxious moments and Salisbury busied himself in explaining away Lytton's Russophobia as 'more literary than anything else'. 'When he has to write an efficient paper', Salisbury added, to the comfort of the India Office, 'he cannot help laying on the colours artistically'.<sup>146</sup>

However, the spirit of cordiality soon eroded. A mixed sense of vexation, resentment and suspicion was to replace it. By the spring of 1877 Lytton's intimate expression, 'My Dear Chief' was dropped in the Viceregal correspondence in favour of a formal 'Your Lordship', while the flamboyant euphemism so characteristic of Lytton's prose gave way to a crisp style—succinct, synoptic and analytical. It was now that he began to complain of Salisbury's change of heart since the conference of Constantinople and his desertion of Lytton's cause.<sup>147</sup> On the basis of stray references in Salisbury's recent letters, supported by the political gossip indulged in by Rawlinson, Lytton came to the conclusion that the Home government was determined not to fall out with Russia for she would need her support, before very long, against Germany, which was considered to be the most dangerous enemy of Britain in the future.<sup>148</sup> The priorities of British foreign policy having changed, the Home government, Lytton complained, had been trying to go halves with Russia in the plunder of Turkey.<sup>149</sup> Gone were the prospects of a well co-ordinated anti-Russian front from Constantinople to Gilgit. On the contrary, Lytton found himself saddled with instructions not to advance to Kabul under any circumstances, not to make any arrangements calculated to

145. Salisbury to Lytton, 9 November 1877, No. 45, LyP..516/2.

146. Salisbury to Mallet, 7 June 1876, SalP.

147. Lytton to Stephen, 24 June 1877 and 17 July 1877, SteP. Box. I.

148. *Ibid*; Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 July 1877, LayP. Add. 39064, p. 49;

Lytton to Salisbury, 5 April 1877, SalP.; Lytton to R. Strachey, 10 November 1879, StaP.; Lytton to Stephen, 17 July 1877, SteP. Box. I.

149. 'I hope you are as much put out as we are at Lord Salisbury's Cabul utterances. Isn't it odd? Don't you remember how we all slaved and worked last year, night and day, to carry out his policy and yet in his first public utterance not a word of praise or acknowledgment to Lord Lytton or to anyone else and a very garbled version moreover of the whole business!' Burne to Pelly, 28 July 1877, PelP.

give umbrage to the Russians and to deal with the Afghan question as a local issue.<sup>150</sup>

Salisbury had made no bones about the major shift in emphasis in British foreign policy and her interests.<sup>151</sup> For the sake of clarity, it may be worthwhile to give a short sketch of the main features of the Eastern Question which had much to do with the reactions of the Foreign Office towards the Central Asian problem.

Owing to a rebellion attended by Turkish 'atrocities' in Bulgaria and the adjacent provinces, the Eastern Question had become acute in 1876, and a conference between the great powers was arranged in Constantinople. Salisbury was sent out in December as the British plenipotentiary. His purpose was to secure as far as possible both the integrity and the safety of its Christian subjects. Instead of an occupation of Bulgaria by Russia he brought the powers to agree upon the appointment of an international commission to reorganise the territory with the support of six thousand Belgian troops, with the intention of placing it, together with Bosnia and Herzegovina, under the control of governors nominated by the Sultan and approved by the concert. The Porte, however, refused to accept these terms and Salisbury returned to Britain at the end of January 1877. War between Russia and Turkey followed in April, and the Russians were within reach of Constantinople by the end of the year. The treaty of San Stefano (3 March 1878), however, put the Russians clearly in the wrong, in as much as it was a violation of the integrity of Turkey, guaranteed by Britain, France, and Austria in 1856. The British government accordingly required all the terms of that armistice to be submitted to a European conference. The Russian reply reserved to Russia the right of excluding from the discussion whatever clause of the treaty it chose. This brought the two powers to the brink of war, and Derby, who was unprepared for that contingency, resigned the foreign secretarship. Salisbury was appointed to the vacant office on 1 April 1878, and Cranbrook moved to the India Office. On

2 April the new Foreign Secretary issued his famous 'Circular', requiring that all the articles of the treaty of San Stefano should be submitted to the proposed conference, declaring emphatically against the creation of a 'big' Bulgaria, and arguing that the Turkish concessions to Russia might be tolerated individually. The subsequent secret negotiations with Russia resulted in an agreement to divide the proposed province into two parts—that south of the Balkans to be administered by a Christian ruler nominated by the Sultan. The secret convention with Russia was balanced by a secret convention with Turkey over the fate of Cyprus. This programme of a partition of European Turkey was given more formal shape in the Congress of Berlin (13 June-13 July, 1878). It may be noted that British diplomacy under Salisbury deviated from the traditional Turkish policy of Great Britain. Here lay the main conflict of opinion between Lytton and Layard on the one hand and Salisbury on the other.<sup>152</sup>

To the two major issues of the current public debate, namely whether Turkey was still sustainable, and whether Russia was the real danger of the future, Salisbury added some fundamental reservations. As regards the first, Salisbury felt that the old policy of defending British interests by sustaining the Ottoman Empire, although wise enough in the past, had become impracticable, and he thought that the time had come for defending British interests 'in a more direct way by some territorial rearrangements'.<sup>153</sup> In defence of his assessment of the Eastern Question, Salisbury wrote to his subordinate in India : 'The commonest error in politics is sticking to the carcasses of dead policies. When a mast falls overhead, you do not try to save a rope here and spare one there in the memory of their former utility. You cut away the hamper altogether. And this should then be the same with a policy'.<sup>154</sup> Thus he would maintain that the efforts to secure the waterways of India by the acquisition of Egypt or of Crete would in no way discourage the obliteration of Turkey.<sup>155</sup> The patient might linger on for some time,

152. It is outside the scope of the present study to go further into the problems of the Near East. The Salisbury papers, as well as those of Layard, are very useful for this purpose. For a good critical study of the foreign policy of Salisbury, especially with regard to the Eastern Question, see A.L. Kennedy, 'Salisbury : *Portrait of a Statesman*', London, 1853, pp. 103-45; G. Waterfield, 'Layard of Nineveh', London, 1963, pp. 379-422.
153. Salisbury to Lytton, 9 March 1877, SalP.
154. Salisbury to Lytton, 25 May 1877, SalP.
155. Salisbury to Lytton, 15 June 1877, SalP.

but the disease, as Salisbury saw it, was past cure. The 'nutrition diet of loan' could no longer be continued, especially in view of the anti-Turk sentiment swayed by Gladstone.<sup>156</sup> In fact Hartington and Northcote between them represented the characteristic feeling in Britain. This was more and more peacefully inclined, and entirely indisposed to believe in India's being exposed to a military danger.<sup>157</sup> 'From all I hear the dominant feeling around you at Simla has no relation or similarity whatever to the English feeling', Salisbury retorted sharply, 'and whichever is abstractly right, the English feeling—by which I do not mean mob and press, but the feeling of the Parliament and Government—must govern'.<sup>158</sup> It was somewhat startling, he added, to have the foreign policy of Great Britain prescribed by the sentiments of 'the people whom we have conquered in the East'.<sup>159</sup>

As for the second issue, Salisbury considered Russia very weak and felt that she was aware of it. 'She is formidable enough for Turkey', Salisbury wrote, 'but even this Turkish war will be a very severe strain upon her...mined by Revolution—on the very brink of bankruptcy—without any commander of any note and having to contend even in the defence of her own frontiers against the difficulties of enormous distances and scanty population—she seems to me powerless for a distant blow'.<sup>160</sup> Salisbury was aware that Russia might intrigue for some time to come and that Lytton ought to expect plenty of it in Afghanistan, in Persia and in the Euphrates. 'But the injury it can do,' he wrote, 'is limited'.<sup>161</sup> He believed in the ability of Britain to humiliate the Russians in Central Asia, but he was equally certain of the impossibility of defeating them permanently. Would the result, he asked, be worth the cost? Apart from the enormous burden on Indian revenue it would force Britain to live in a state of war 'for the sake of the Central Asian raids'.<sup>162</sup> It was from this singularly British angle of vision that Salisbury proceeded to assure Lytton that things were not as bad 'as they seem to you in

156. Salisbury to Lytton, 9 February 1877, SalP.

157. Salisbury to Lytton, 10 August 1877, SalP.

158. *Ibid.*

159. 'We did not allow a few years ago the feelings of the Irish to affect the policy which on grounds of European interests we thought it right to pursue to Italy. My feelings towards the Sultan under the circumstances resemble those which a Secretary of State in Elizabeth's time might have felt towards the Pope'. Salisbury to Lytton, 15 June 1877, SalP.

160. Salisbury to Lytton, 16 February 1877, SalP.

161. Salisbury to Lytton, 22 March 1877, SalP.

162. Salisbury to Lytton, 3 July 1877, SalP.

the savage solitude of Simla'.<sup>163</sup> Russia would, he asserted, be enormously weakened in men and money by the war even if she gained a few strategic positions.<sup>164</sup> It must have meant a complete rejection of the long memoranda and minutes penned by the Viceroy with Pelly, Colley<sup>165</sup> and Burne about him. 'The effect of modern changes,' Salisbury wrote, in giving his final opinion on the subject, 'is consistently to diminish the value of strategic positions and to increase the value of pecuniary resources'.<sup>166</sup> In July 1878 Cranbrook,<sup>167</sup> then in the India Office,<sup>168</sup> made it plain that Central Asian news did not make much impression upon the Home government, as it believed that Russia was only making a show to assert itself in Europe.<sup>169</sup> On the contrary, the impression in London was fast growing, as Lytton complained and Salisbury was to acknowledge, that Berlin was the 'centre of the great European intrigue'.<sup>170</sup> In fact, such a view was becoming a fashionable creed in the British Foreign Office. Bismarck's tentative attempts at forming a working alliance in Europe had received little encouragement in London and the British Ambassador in Berlin was told to 'make that great man understand that in our system of parliamentary government the alliance he wished for was a simple impossibility'.<sup>171</sup> If any danger threatened

163. Salisbury to Lytton, 16 February 1877, SalP.

164. Salisbury to Lytton, 15 June 1877, SalP.

165. Colley, Sir George Pomery (1835-81); Major-General; educated at Sandhurst; border magistrate and surveyor in Cape colony, 1857; captain, 1860; served in China; brevet-major, 1863; lieutenant colonel in the Ashanti campaign, 1873; visited Natal and Transvaal, 1875; secretary to the Viceroy of India, 1876; chief of staff in Zulu War, 1879; K.C.B.I., 1879; Major-General to the Governor of Natal, 1880; killed at Majuba Hill, 26 February 1881.

166. Salisbury to Lytton, 15 June 1877, SalP.

167. Gathorne-Hardy Gathorne, first earl of Cranbrook (1814-1905); entered Parliament in 1856 as Conservative member; under-secretary for Home affairs, 1858-9; president of the poor law board, 1866; Home Secretary, 1867-8; Secretary of State for war, 1874-8; upon Derby's resignation moved to the India office in succession to Lord Salisbury, 1878-80; raised to the peerage as Viscount of Hemsted; Lord President of the Council, 1885, 1886-92; resigned with Lord Salisbury in 1892; created Earl of Cranbrook, 1892. Retired from public life in 1896.

168. Derby resigned in April 1878. Salisbury moved to the Foreign Office and Cranbrook was selected to preside over the India Office.

169. Cranbrook to Lytton, 18 June 1877, LyP. 519/2.

170. Salisbury to Lytton, 15 March 1877, SalP.

171. Correspondence with Germany, 1878-80, from Berlin, 4 January 1880, SalP. A/9, p. 191.

Europe, it was maintained, it was 'much nearer home and would come from a far more formidable military power', and 'we may be fighting for Holland before two years are out'.<sup>172</sup>

The attitude of the Home government towards Russia on the Central Asian question may be illuminated by a few examples. First, there is the history of Lytton's ill-fated Merv despatch.<sup>173</sup> The Foreign Office was furious at Lytton's suggestion. 'The first thing that strikes is the extraordinary way in which the European situation is ignored,' Tenterden noted on the Indian despatch. 'Yet it is obvious that the whole of our policy towards Russia depends on it.'<sup>174</sup> It was argued that a war with Russia, undertaken to prevent an advance on Herat from a position eight hundred miles off, would not be intelligible to public opinion in Britain, that it would be looked upon as a mere pretext for defending Turkey and that the British government ought not to adopt the *casus belli* plan in the heartland of Turkistan. 'If this were done,' the Foreign Office insisted, 'our policy of peace or war would be at the mercy of the Turkomans over whom we have no sort of control and of whom we have only the vaguest knowledge'.<sup>175</sup> Accordingly, Lytton was told of the strong objections entertained by the Cabinet to any unofficial war in any actual or inspired hostile action against Russia, and was instructed to limit his diplomatic action to Afghanistan only.<sup>176</sup> 'We differ from you in this', Salisbury wrote to Lytton; 'we think that there is more time before you than you appear to believe. It is not necessary to use violent measures either in the way of compulsion or purchase; for there will be time to wait until the present obstacles are determined by the course of events'.<sup>177</sup>

Secondly, we must note the attempt of Lytton to influence British foreign policy in favour of a German alliance against Russia by entering into direct communication with figures in influential positions, including Queen Victoria.<sup>178</sup> The criticisms of the British

172. Salisbury to Lytton, 15 March 1877, SalP. Salisbury to Lytton, 16 February 1877, SalP. Salisbury to Lytton, 2 March 1877, SalP.

173. See footnote 104 of the present chapter,

174. 'Tenterden's review of the despatch from the Government of India, 2 July 1877', Private/Cabinet/From Salisbury 1874-8, DerP.

175. *Ibid.*

176. Salisbury to Lytton, 1 June 1877, SalP.

177. Salisbury to Lytton, 14 August 1877, SalP.

178. Lytton wrote a pamphlet and its copies were circulated to his friends.

foreign policy would have been harmless, had they come from anyone who was not connected with the executive. The Cabinet seemed most worried over the fact that the world would not believe that a Governor-General of India could have expressed such views without having good reason for doing so. His pamphlet was widely circulated and it was apprehended that it would reach the Press in some form or other. It was felt that the matter was serious enough to justify a recall and it was only in view of the famine crisis that the Cabinet felt it expedient to let this official breach of propriety pass.<sup>179</sup>

As regards Lytton's attempt to use Turkish influence over Afghanistan in order to raise a holy war against Russia (supported by Layard and over the head of Salisbury),<sup>180</sup> the Home government made an even more serious objection. Although the proposed Turkish mission to Afghanistan was prompted ostensibly by the Porte, Salisbury did not fail to discern the intrigue behind the scenes.<sup>181</sup> Hence, Lytton was censured and the passage of the mission through Indian territory was prohibited. Upon further representation from the Indian government the mission was allowed, but instructions were sent to the effect that the Indian government was to dissociate itself officially from the mission, that no correspondence should be opened between Lytton and Layard<sup>182</sup>, and finally no permission was to be given for the proposed establishment of a Turkish consulate at Peshawar.<sup>183</sup>

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One of these reached the Queen. See the text in Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 July 1877, LayP. Add. 39164. Derby wrote with regard to Lytton's intrigue: 'I am afraid Lytton has been making a fool of himself. Of course with the best intentions. To go against law in the name of humanity is just what a poet turned despot is sure to do'. Derby to Bourke, 20 August 1877, Private/F.O. Officials/Drafts 1174-77, DerP.

<sup>179.</sup> Derby to Disraeli, 9 October 1877, Private/Cabinet/To Lord Beaconsfield, DerP.

<sup>180.</sup> For details see LayP. Add. 39164.

<sup>181.</sup> 'The enclosed papers', wrote Salisbury, 'show that Layard has been taking his orders from Lytton instead of from you. If this is allowed to go on the result will be most unfortunate—and may be disastrous. Lytton is burning with anxiety to distinguish himself in a great war and if you allow him to direct Layard's movements I warn you dangers will be the result'. Salisbury to Derby, 21 June 1877, SalP.

<sup>182.</sup> Lytton to Stephen, 24 June 1877, SteP. Box I. Also, Salisbury to Derby, 11 June, SalP.

<sup>183.</sup> 'To the consul at Peshawar', Salisbury wrote, 'I entertain the strongest objection. Our policy may not be always pleasing to the Mahomedans.'

(see next page)

However dramatic the shift in British foreign policy in the late seventies might have been, so far as Afghanistan and related problems were concerned, Salisbury remained fairly consistent in his basic attitudes and formulations. In shaping foreign and imperial policies his chief concern had always been for British interests, and he had an extraordinary clarity of mind in defining these interests cogently. As soon as he came into office, he felt seriously disturbed by the dangerous political complex of the north-western frontier of India and beyond it. True, he regarded the issue of the appointment of a resident in Afghanistan as vital to British and Indian interests and as always in such cases he was uncompromising to the point of ruthlessness. 'I do not propose to send a mission to Afghanistan against the wishes of the Ameer,' he wrote in a confidential memorandum to the Prime Minister, 'but I propose to tell the government of India to make the Ameer wish it.'<sup>184</sup> It was a feasible proposition in so far as he believed genuinely that the Amir was frightened of Russia. Even after the Peshawar conference he insisted in giving the Amir a fair chance. If such a move were to fail, however, Salisbury would prescribe measures independent of the Amir and regardless of his interests. Did he mean a military movement to Kabul? Certainly not. In 1875 the Foreign Office had entered into fresh correspondence with its counterpart in St. Petersburg on the status of Afghanistan. The net result of the correspondence was that while the question of a neutral zone was dropped once and for all by both parties, they did agree upon a new formula. This was contained in a memorandum by Derby subsequently confirmed by Gortchakoff.<sup>185</sup> Under the new system, Britain undertook to honour

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To have at such a time, in the middle of our most dangerous Moslem population a centre of fanatical intrigue, would be anything but agreeable'. *Ibid.*

184. Quoted in Kennedy, '*Salisbury etc.*', *op. cit.*, p. 86.

185. Enclosure in No. 93B, F.O. 539/11, pp. 85-7. The relevant portion of the Memorandum of Derby may be quoted at length: 'Various combinations were proposed and discussed [in the Central Asian correspondence initiated by Clarendon and concluded in 1873] with this object [of preventing a contact between the two European frontiers in Asia] the creation of neutral zone, the delineation of frontiers, the recognition of the Oxus as the line which neither power should permit their force to cross, the maintenance of Afghanistan and Bukhara as Independent states, the former under British and the latter under Russian influence.'

the independence and integrity of Afghanistan while Russia would for her part do the same as regards Bukhara.<sup>186</sup> Such an understanding considerably limited the scope of action with regard to Afghanistan. In November 1876 when Lytton, after an enquiry from Salisbury (as to what the Viceroy was capable of doing in the event of war with Russia), made extensive military preparation on the frontier, there was considerable alarm in Britain. Salisbury was in Constantinople and on his return to London wrote, 'It is of little use making military preparations and discussing military expeditions. They will not give us the chance'.<sup>187</sup> He insisted on the futility of fighting the unlucky 'native dupes' of Russia, 'who have no prestige to lose, no finances to ruin, whom great defeats will not disarm and whose enmity will be a permanent embarrassment'.<sup>188</sup> Hence he advocated fighting the Russians with their own weapon, namely, intrigue. If the Russians were gaining influence, he argued, the British must gain influence too, and the instrument for doing so could not have differed very much in the hands of the two operators.<sup>189</sup> Working on this hypothesis, Salisbury came out wholeheartedly in support of Lytton's moves to upset Sher Ali by intrigue. But the engineering of the fall of the Afghan ruler was not all that was contemplated.

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The last combination, as represented in the Memorandum under consideration appear to be the only form of an arrangement with regard to which any definite understanding has been found practicable and Her Majesty's Government have always fully appreciated the conciliatory spirit in which the question has been approached by the Russian Government. 'Memorandum on Russian policy in Central Asia in reply to that enclosed in Prince Gortchakoff' despatch to Count Schouvaloff of 11 May 1875, *ibid.*

186. Dwelling on the new obligations in Afghanistan Salisbury wrote: 'Any violation on our part of the territory of Afghanistan would be moving forward and would give them a fair right to ask questions. But we must not admit that Quetta is in the same position, though we have no present intention of meddling with it'. Salisbury to Derby, 15 March 1875, SalP.

187. Salisbury to Lytton, 4 May 1877, SalP.

188. *Ibid.* In fact Salisbury confessed that both Kizil Arvat and Merv were already parts of the Russian Empire as assigned by the Agreement of 1873. 'Keith Johnson makes them so', he wrote, 'and although there are other maps by strong opponents of Russia which tell a different story, I have not been able to discover any official evidence on which their delineation rests'. Salisbury to Lytton, 3 July 1877, SalP.

189. Salisbury to Lytton, 4 May 1877, SalP.

In fact, in dealing with the Eastern Question, from Turkey to Afghanistan, Salisbury was inclined to face the problems separately, judging each issue on its own individual merits and taking into account the presence of the rival power as a reality, which, though capable of being contained, could not be rooted out. All the way from the Aegean and the Mediterranean seas Salisbury found a vast region wherein the existing forces of government were slowly decaying. Few who were acquainted with the East, he would argue, would have thought that Britain could safely look on till the process of decay had eaten out all the powers of resistance. He was aware that many would have opted for a partial or a complete occupation of Persia, of Afghanistan and even of Mesopotamia. Salisbury considered that such a step would be an extreme remedy, 'pressing heavily on our exchequer with a weight almost overwhelmingly on our recruiting machinery'. On the contrary, he favoured what he called 'the pacific invasion' by Britain. As merchants, as railway makers, as engineers, as travellers, later on as employees like Gordon or Killop, or as ministers like River Wilson, Britishers were bound to assert their domination not by political privilege and military power, but by right of the strongest mind'. The taking of Cyprus and the acquisition of a right to reform Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, Salisbury argued, would give the opportunity for the necessary pacific invasion and he would like to see some such remedy applied in Afghanistan as the best bulwark against the Russian advance. 'Once obtain the unrestricted right of access', he wrote confidently, 'and in a few years you will govern without ever drawing a sword'.<sup>190</sup>

Thus in Afghanistan, when her northern frontier had been settled for a time, Salisbury was concerned in putting western and southern Afghanistan on a more stable relationship with British India. Early in July 1874, he had written to Northbrook that the Amir was not worth any money and arms and 'we ought to undertake no responsibility on his behalf. It is on the road from Dadur to Herat that our eyes should be fixed'.<sup>191</sup> He was convinced that Kabul would never cause much trouble or offer a reliable defence. But the road from Herat to the Indian frontier ought to be thoroughly explored in all questions of commissariat, communication and military positions. 'We ought to be as ready for a march to Herat

190. The arguments of this section are based on a 'Memorandum' drawn by Salisbury himself. See Salisbury to R. Temple, 20 September 1878, SalP. A. 21. The same in CranP. 501.

191. Salisbury to Northbrook, 10 July 1874, N.P./11.

is probable that it would be Quetta where the name of his successor would be settled'.<sup>198</sup> In 1875 Salisbury had urged Derby to defend the treaty right of the British to move to Quetta, and, on Lytton's assumption of office, he instructed him to bring Khelat into more orderly state and with the help of 'that admirable treaty of 1854 to try to outflank the Ameer'.<sup>199</sup> Everything depended, he insisted, on the skill with which Lytton played his very difficult game of chess, and, on the question of Kohuk, he laid bare the type of diplomacy that Lytton was expected to employ.<sup>200</sup> But 'whatever you do', he urged the Viceroy, 'protect Quetta—it is your Queen'.<sup>201</sup> Lytton did protect Quetta. But he did much beyond that. It was on Kabul that he fixed his attention.<sup>202</sup> It was not the valley of Helmund but the Oxus basin that was to be his objective. Kabul was the centre of the Afghan polity and to jump on it was invariably to upset its ruler. And if the Cabinet was unwilling, Lytton would not hesitate to drag them along.

198. Salisbury to Lytton, 19 July 1876, SalP.

199. Salisbury to Lytton, 19 July 1876, SalP.

200. Salisbury drew a strong distinction between 'recognising title and taking possession' of an eastern territory. He did not care who had it practically so long as it commanded no strategic importance. But if there was any strategic importance in those areas as in the case of Kohuk or Quetta, the title of *de jure* possession was a question of moment. 'We may have to justify', he warned, 'an occupation or a march through it...before the public opinion of this country. And any weakness on this point of formal ownership would be very embarrassing here in the west', Salisbury to Lytton, 23 February 1877, SalP.

201. Salisbury to Lytton, 16 August 1876, SalP.

202. Lytton to Rawlinson, 25 April 1875, LyP. 518/1.

as the Prussians were for the march to Paris'.<sup>192</sup> In March 1876, he approved Lytton's chart of a scientific frontier but considered it unnecessary for he thought that every 'increase of refinement in modern warfare was an increase of the strength of the British', and that it would tend to make comparatively weaker the Russian army which would have to cross the Himalayas and the Hindukush before it could give battle on the Indian frontier.<sup>193</sup> In fact, he drew Lytton's attention to Baluchistan where he was disgusted with the doctrine of non-intervention having been carried a good deal too far.<sup>194</sup> His impression was that if the Khan was carefully handled, British influence in Khelat would grow more rapidly than in Afghanistan and it was from their territory that 'you [Lytton] will watch the proceedings of Russia on the Atrek as well as the Murghab'.<sup>195</sup> Thus with Baluchistan firmly in hand, Salisbury concluded, the importance of the Amir of Afghanistan would be infinitely diminished.<sup>196</sup> In his private instructions to Lytton he dwelt on this at great length. If the Kabul mission failed, he argued, great importance, although not much prominence or emphasis, was to be attached to the Khelat mission with a view to establishing a British agent in Quetta. In fact, the prospect of a smooth 'operation Quetta' made Salisbury dream very romantic visions. Possibly Salisbury thought that the distinguished and discontented subjects of the Amir might think it worthwhile occasionally to visit the agent at Quetta. All the jealousy of the Afghan prince would not prevent the agent from having close and intimate relations with the chief people of Kandahar and possibly his correspondence would extend to Kabul itself and British 'rupees would try conclusions with Russian roubles'.<sup>197</sup> He even ventured to predict that if the agent were a competent man, 'in short if he were Sir John Pelly, any Afghan minister in whom Russian proclivities had been nurtured by a policy of masterly inactivity would soon find a journey across the Hindukush necessary for the preservation of his bodily health. If matters get worse and the Ameer's sulks developed into treachery—it

192. Salisbury to Northbrook, 8 July 1875; also see Salisbury to Northbrook, 7 January 1875, N.P./12 and Salisbury to Northbrook, 14 January 1875, N.P./12.

193. Salisbury to Lytton, 24 March 1876, SalP.

194. *Ibid.*

195. Salisbury to Lytton, 26 May 1876, SalP.

196. Salisbury to Lytton, 2 August 1876, SalP.

197. Salisbury to Lytton, 16 August 1876, SalP.

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202. Lytton to Rawlinson, 25 April 1875, LyP. 518/1.

## 5 | The Peshawar Conference and its Aftermath

The quest for a scientific frontier was the crucial issue of Lytton's Central Asian policy. His grandiose scheme for imperial defence covered extensive territories that stretched from the Pamirs to the Persian Gulf. Yarkand, Merv and the valley of the Euphrates fell within its orbit. The whole scheme, however, had two distinct tiers. In the outlying areas Lytton intended to counter Russian diplomacy and intrigues with well-matched countermoves. Lytton's object, on these scores, was primarily defensive : to raise a diplomatic barrier against Russian activities by the recognition of a right of complaint at several points in the debatable land of Central Asia—territories which, according to Lytton, were ultimately to be absorbed by the two interested European powers. Beneath this outer skin of a defensive network lay Afghanistan, which, along with Khelat, Kafiristan and Chitral, offered a different perspective. Here, Lytton was not prepared to tolerate the presence of any rival power of influence. On the contrary, he was determined to expel the presence of Russian influence from the Afghan complex once and for all, to ensure the security of British interests upto the Hindukush ranges and Lake Victoria, and finally, to organise the military positions of British India in such a way as to command the Russian line all along the unsettled frontier in Central Asia. In fact, it was the extension of the military boundary of India to the political horizons of Afghanistan that formed the inner skin of Lytton's trans-frontier policy and, consequently, his immediate concern.<sup>1</sup> He was apt to view the formation of such a system of defence as a matter of local initiative, especially in view of the reluctance of the British Foreign Office to commit its Russian counterpart to a reasonable under-

1. For details of Lytton's strategy, see chapter 4.

standing about Central Asia. On his way to India, Lytton had made up his mind as to the precise nature of his Afghan overtures.<sup>2</sup> Once having made a decision, he was ruthless in its execution, and neither the apprehensions of his Council nor the directives of the Home government could have deterred him from what he considered to be his chief mission in India. 'Of the great questions I am trying to deal with', he wrote to his friend, 'the most pressing is the state of our frontier relations, which has been shamefully neglected and grievously mismanaged. I feel until this is placed on a better footing, internal questions must wait'.<sup>3</sup>

The basic assumption of Lytton's Afghan policy was that the demand for a scientific frontier was incompatible with the existing patterns of Anglo-Afghan relations. His scheme for ascendancy in Central Asia depended on the extent to which Sher Ali could be relied upon as a faithful ally.<sup>4</sup> To put the problem the other way round, it was indispensable for him to gauge the intensity of the alienation of the Afghan ruler from the Government of India. Northbrook would have liked the Home government to believe that the existing relations between Calcutta and Kabul contained all that was desirable and that the initiative for a closer connection ought to have originated from Kabul.<sup>5</sup> His arguments, however, had been found untenable and there was considerable doubt in some responsible quarters in India as to the efficacy of continuing the traditional policy. Haines<sup>6</sup> had serious misgivings about it.<sup>7</sup> Aitchison<sup>8</sup> was aware that it would result in Sher Ali's alienation.<sup>9</sup> There was

2. Lytton to Salisbury, 14 February 1876, SalP.; Lytton to Salisbury, 1 April 1876, SalP.; Lytton to Salisbury, 14 March 1876, SalP.; Lytton to Frere, 26 March 1876, LyP. 518/1.
3. Lytton to Stephen, 26 March 1876, SteP. Box I.
4. Haines to Lytton, 20 March 1877, LyP. 518/2.
5. For Northbrook's views, see chapter 4.
6. Haines, Sir Frederick Paul (1819-1909); joined 4th Regiment, 1839; served in 1st Sikh war; Military Secretary to Lord Gough, 1846-9, and to Sir Patrick Grant at Madras, 1856-60; commanded Mysore division, 1865-70; Commander-in-Chief at Madras, 1871-5; Lieutenant-General, 1873; Commander-in-Chief in India, 1876-81; Field-Marshal, 1890.
7. Lytton to Salisbury, 1 April 1876, SalP.
8. Aitchison, Sir Charles Umpherston (1832-96); entered Indian Civil Services, 1855; under-secretary in Political Department, India, 1859-65; Commissioner of Lahore; Foreign Secretary, 1868-78; Chief Commissioner of British Burma, 1878-81; Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, 1882; member of Governor-General's Council, 1887-88.
9. Aitchison's memorandum on 'Afghan policy', 17 April 1874, SalP.

sufficient evidence to show that the 'do-nothing and know-nothing' policy with regard to Afghanistan was not popular on the frontier.<sup>10</sup> Pollock's<sup>11</sup> opinion, for example, as privately expressed to Frere, was quite irreconcilable with what he expressed to Lord Northbrook.<sup>12</sup> Lytton's conversation with Napier,<sup>13</sup> another official of the 'masterly inactivity' vintage, had resulted in a letter from that experienced general in which he expressed the opinion that the British position in Afghanistan was 'unsafe' and 'humiliating' and recommended that any uncertainty about it should be cleared up as soon as possible.<sup>14</sup> Naturally, it appeared to Lytton that the united front put up by Northbrook against Salisbury had been rendered possible by the official discouragement of any independent opinion adverse to a pre-established policy.<sup>15</sup> Lytton himself was conscious of the inadequacies of earlier British initiatives, which he blamed on the short-sightedness of the 'Gladstone—Northbrook Co.' and the 'treacherous self deception' of the Indian government.<sup>16</sup> In this Lytton was earnest. 'While the Ameer was expected to do all that could have reasonably been expected of him to protect British trade', Lytton was to write, 'we must not be so squeamish as we have hitherto been'.<sup>17</sup> He was eager to impress upon the mind of the Amir the identity of interests between Afghanistan and India vis-a-vis Russia and to offer considerable advantages to the Amir in return for Afghan co-operation in his Russian project. In short, Lytton was determined to inaugurate a new set of relations unrestrained by the condition of the neutrality of Afghanistan as had been agreed upon in 1873.

In defining his proposed policy, Lytton ran into trouble with his administration. The realistic opposition, however, came not so much from the old guard, like Lawrence, who had seen 'the Afghan ghost and had never lost its impression,'<sup>18</sup> as from the neo-Lawrentines in the Indian administration. There was considerable strength in

10. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 April 1876, SalP.

11. Pollock, Chief-commissioner of Peshawar at the time.

12. Frere to Salisbury, 14 February 1876, LyP. 518/2.

13. Napier, Sir Francis, Ninth Baron Napier in the Scottish peerage, (1819-1898); diplomatist and Indian Governor; ambassador at St. Petersburg, 1860-4, and Berlin, 1864-6; Governor of Madras, 1866; temporarily Governor-General of India on assassination of Lord Mayo, 1872.

14. Lytton to Salisbury, 1 April 1876, SalP.

15. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 April 1876, SalP.

<sup>16</sup> Lytton to Salisbury, 1 May 1876, SalP.

<sup>17</sup> Lytton to Bartle Frere, 26 March 1876, LyP. 518/1

<sup>18</sup> Salisbury to Lytton, 13 July 1877, LyP. 516/2

their arguments. They were conscious of the inadequacies of the existing relationship with Afghanistan. But the remedy lay, in their opinion, in an attitude of dignified silence showing neither resentment nor a needless anxiety to win the Amir's friendship.<sup>19</sup> Lytton characterised it as a 'waiting policy', or one of 'passive expectations', destined and intended to grow, at some period in the course of events, into 'a policy of action or at least of attainment'.<sup>20</sup> The protagonists of the waiting policy held that the Amir would alter his policy in favour of the British under the pressure exerted by his own people, or because he would feel apprehensive of Russian aggression.<sup>21</sup> Countering this, Lytton maintained that if the Russians drove Afghanistan towards the British it would lead to a war in which the Russians would catch the British unprepared. 'Our present object, as I understand it, must be, not war for the defence of frontier', he wrote, 'but the security of our frontier, for the prevention of war'.<sup>22</sup> The alliance of the Amir would have lost much of its value, he argued, if instead of enabling 'us to make better provisions for the defence of our own territory, it obliges us to rush unprepared into war'.<sup>23</sup> Besides, for the success of a policy, it was most dangerous to reckon exclusively upon the faults and blunders of others. It could legitimately be asked why the Russians should drive the Amir over to British arms. In fact, the Russians might remain content with a successful attempt at the establishment of a 'pacific political influence at Cabul or a moral ascendancy over the mind of the Ameer'.<sup>24</sup> The Amir would, thus, gradually be detached from the British government in the absence of any positive attempt to counter Russian influence, and in a given situation the most that the British could offer the Amir would certainly be 'less than the least the Russians can offer him, viz., a share in her anticipated conquest of the rich plains of British India'.<sup>25</sup> As regards the proposition that the Amir would make overtures due to internal pressure, Lytton held that the prospects of waiting for such a contingency would be equally perilous. It would, in particular,

19. Aitchison's 'Memo' on Afghan policy, 17 April 1874, SalP.

20. Lytton, 'Confidential note', undated, kept with the letter of the Commissioner of Peshawar to the Amir of Kabul, LyP. 7.

21. Northbrook to Salisbury, 13 December 1874, N.P./22.

22. Lytton, 'Confidential note', undated, LyP. 7.

23. *Ibid.*

24. *Ibid.*

25. *Ibid.*

involve the British government in the internal civil war, either by advancing assistance or by withholding it. Theoretically, it could still be argued that even if Anglo-Afghan relations were not satisfactory, there was no justification for making British relations with Afghanistan worse, and that the recognition by Russia of the exclusive rights of the British to have diplomatic relations with Afghanistan was a sufficiently sound reason for inactivity. Lytton, however, argued that the situation had greatly changed since 1869 when the waiting policy had first been applied. The circumstances of 1876 differed from those of 1869. The neighbour that Lytton was apprehensive of was not Afghanistan but Russia, and the danger was not the loss of territory but the loss of that political influence and prestige, 'which is the most pacific safeguard of territory'.<sup>26</sup> Apart from the considerable gain of Russian influence and territory since the days of Mayo, Lytton was alive to the fact that while the Amir was free to converse with the Russians, the Viceroy had no means of talking to Sher Ali.<sup>27</sup> It was on these considerations that Lytton would not sanction the continuation of a waiting policy. Even if the British intended to remain stationary, he argued, the Russians would not. 'Small bodies gravitate to great ones', he wrote; 'if Afghanistan does not gravitate towards the British, it must gravitate towards the Russian Empire. And between bodies of equivalent gravity the attractive force of one that is in movement will always exceed that of one which is motionless'.<sup>28</sup>

With these considerations in mind, Lytton had drawn up a detailed plan of operations in Afghanistan. 'If I could establish British agents at Herat, Candahar and Balkh,' he wrote on his appointment, 'a Viceroy's agent in direct confidential intercourse with the Ameer...a British right of trade and travel in Afghanistan, I should be perfectly satisfied for the present'.<sup>29</sup> But the one lesson he was eager to impart to Sher Ali was that if he did not promptly prove himself to be a loyal friend, Lytton would be obliged to regard him as an enemy and treat him accordingly. 'A tool in the hands of Russia I will never allow him to become; such a tool it would be my duty to break before it could be used'.<sup>30</sup>

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

28. *Ibid.*

29. Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 57; also, Lytton to Bartle Frere, 26 March 1876, LyP. 510/1, p. 51.

30. Lytton to Girdlestone, 27 August 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 430.

To begin with, Lytton was sincere about an Afghan alliance, as he understood it. He was sympathetic towards the grievances of the Amir. A definite defensive alliance against foreign aggression, recognition of the succession of Abdullah Jan to the throne upon the death of Sher Ali, the fortification of Herat, the drilling of the Afghan army and assistance for the construction of telegraphic communications with India were some of the substantial concessions he was willing to make in order to rectify past inadequacies.<sup>31</sup> He was not yet convinced of the strength of Rawlinson's proposals for detaching Herat and Kandahar from Afghanistan. On the contrary, the first step to be taken, he thought 'was to be politically established in Cabul'.<sup>32</sup> Evidently, Lytton would not trust the frontier administration and the Punjab government to carry on the negotiations with Sher Ali. They were committed, he feared, to Northbrook's line of action. Hence, Lytton would prefer to inform the Amir through an indirect channel, by means of a letter from Lytton, of a 'new departure' which it would be to the Amir's advantage to meet half-way.<sup>33</sup> As regards the course of the negotiations, Lytton decided that they should be so managed as to give to any terms concluded the appearance of 'acquiescence on our part in demands on the part of Sher Ali rather than that of concessions on his part to solicitations from us'.<sup>34</sup> The net result of his management of the Council was satisfactory; nothing was put on paper and it was understood that the question was not to be treated through the secretariat but by direct personal communication between the Viceroy and the Amir.<sup>35</sup> Lytton was satisfied that he had the general assent of the Council to his project about Afghanistan 'without much discussion'.<sup>36</sup>

There were two related problems of some significance that demanded immediate attention and Lytton's handling of these issues showed a genuine interest in a Kabul alliance. First, there was the affair of Khelat, where the baronial pretensions of the Sardars and the weakness of the Khan offered the prospect of perpetual anarchy.<sup>37</sup>

31. Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 58.

32. Lytton to Frere, 26 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 52.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 April 1876, SalP.

36. *Ibid.*

37. For a good summary of the Khelat Question, see 'Confidential Memo on Khelat by the Viceroy', 22 September 1876, LyP. 520/1

The problem, as viewed by Lytton, was one of social evolution and he would not allow the continuation of the existing policy of Northbrook of supporting the Sardars against the Khan.<sup>38</sup> 'What would be the reaction of Shere Ali', Lytton wrote with great concern, 'if he found that the object and result of your [Sandeman's] present mission to Khelat had been to reduce the Prince of that country to the meanest political nonentity, to take from him the last vestige of his independence and plant in the heart of his domestic administration an *imperium in imperio*?'<sup>39</sup> He was alive to the need of occupying Quetta with ease and promptitude in case of an emergency.<sup>40</sup> But he saw that the remedy did not lie in harsh words and timid acts, as had been prescribed by Northbrook. As Sandeman was already on the move, he could do little but limit the scope of his mission.<sup>41</sup> He would, however, take care to ensure that a final settlement of Khelat affairs was postponed until the completion of Pelly's negotiations with Sher Ali. He intended to let Pelly deal with the Khan, and, in any case, 'with the advantage of a stronger fulcrum'.<sup>42</sup>

In the second place, the uncertainties of the political future of Kafiristan, Chitral and Gilgit<sup>43</sup> offered a real threat, once the presence of Russia along the banks of the Oxus was seen as within the range of practical possibility. Obviously, Lytton saw a satisfactory countermove in a corresponding extension of Kashmiri rule over those areas either under the inspiration of the British or under the aegis of Kabul.<sup>44</sup> As he proceeded to execute the initial moves, Lytton did not lose sight of the second alternative. The Punjab authorities, ignorant of Lytton's plans concerning Afghanistan, seemed disposed to encourage an alliance between the rulers of Kashmir and Chitral, both hostile to Sher Ali. Lytton forbade the to be pursued towards Chitral would be entirely dependent

38. Lytton to R.H. Davies, 12 May 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 506.

39. *Ibid.*

40. Lytton to Salisbury, 14 April 1876, SalP.

41. Lytton to Salisbury, 1 April 1876, SalP.

42. Lytton to Salisbury, 14 April 1876; SalP. Also, Lytton to Frere, 26 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 47.

43. For a comprehensive study of British policy towards Gilgit, Chitral and Yassin, see the following memoranda of the 'Secret and Political Department': A.18, A.83, A.92, A.93, A.95, A.96, A.96A, A.97, A.98, A.99 and A.100.

44. Lytton to R.H. Davies, 12 May 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 506.

on the result of his negotiations with Sher Ali.<sup>45</sup> If Sher Ali could be thoroughly secured he saw no objection to his absorption of Chitral 'under conditions to be laid down by us'.<sup>46</sup> It was only in the contrary case that Lytton was to play Chitral as a trump card against the Amir. Lytton's approach to the uncertain legal and political situation of Kohuk showed a similar concern for the Afghan alliance. He was determined that the solution of the problem of Kohuk must wait till 'we have defined our position at Kabul and Khelat'.<sup>47</sup> In short, it was only if Sher Ali was found to be irretrievably alienated from the British, so that it was impossible to save the Afghan card, that Lytton would resort to a change of partners for the next rubber and score it to Russia. It was only then—and not earlier—that Lytton would turn his attention more seriously towards Persia and adopt the project for detaching Herat, Kandahar and Kabul.<sup>48</sup>

It would not be amiss here to examine the nature of Lytton's new deal and the Amir's response to it. The details of Lytton's initial feeler were drafted at a meeting in Ambala where the Viceroy had summoned his closest confidants, Bellew,<sup>49</sup> Pelly and Burne, and where, together with Pollock, they decided to send a letter to the Amir requesting safe custody for a mission. It was also decided that a native agent was to take the message to Kabul regarding the reception of the Viceroy's envoy, that the messenger was to be carefully selected (the function was in fact entrusted to the A.D.C. of the Viceroy) and that he was to be so well-versed in the subject of his errand as to make sure that he would convince the Amir that it really meant a new start with the British government with prospects of immediate gain to himself.<sup>50</sup> The letter itself said enough without saying too much,<sup>51</sup> and Lytton hoped that he had done everything to

45. Lytton to Salibury, 2 May 1876, SalP.

46. *Ibid.*

47. Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 55. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 May 1876, SalP.

48. Lytton to Frere, 26 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 47; also Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 55.

49. Bellew, Henry Walter, (1834-1892); served in Crimea, 1854-5; joined the Bengal medical service, 1855; deputy surgeon-general, 1881; served with Major (Sir) Henry Lumsden in Kandahar mission; C.S.I. 1873; chief political officer at Kabul; retired as surgeon-general in 1886.

50. Lytton to Bartle Frere, 26 March 1876, LyP. 518/1, p. 47.

51. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 April 1876, SalP.

ensure a favourable reception of the proposed mission without exposing himself to any public embarrassment if the Amir proved unmanageable.<sup>52</sup>

The letter from the Commissioner of Peshawar was skillfully phrased.<sup>53</sup> Having announced Lytton's succession to the office of Viceroy it made reference to the intention of the Viceroy to depute his friend, Sir Lewis Pelly, to Kabul, accompanied by Bellew and Major St. John, in order to deliver to the Kabul ruler a 'Khurita' informing him of Lytton's assumption of office and the new title of Her Majesty. It was further stated that Pelly had been authorised to discuss matters of 'common interest to the two Governments'. It is significant to note that Lytton virtually denied the Afghan ruler any say in the matter of whether a British mission was to be sent to Afghanistan at all. The Viceroy having decided to send one, Sher Ali was merely left to select the place of its reception. This would have made it difficult for him to decline to receive it without going further 'than he will probably like to go in the open rejection of our proposed goodwill'.<sup>54</sup> Lytton had already made up his mind. If the offer was rejected, another option would be offered; but if that too was rejected he would lose no time in putting a different frontier policy into force. Lytton was convinced that in such a contingency it would not be difficult 'to put the screw on Sher Ali'.<sup>55</sup>

To Lytton's disappointment, Sher Ali's response was neither immediate nor affirmative. The Amir had read Rawlinson, especially the proposals regarding the partitioning of Central Asia.<sup>56</sup> His envoy had returned from Simla empty-handed and indignant with the duplicity of the British and Northbrook's high-handedness.<sup>57</sup> The

52. Lytton found it difficult to keep absolute secrecy with regard to the mission owing to the indiscretions of Frere, who had set the whole official world on that part of the frontier speculating about the mission. In order to divert attention and suspicion from the true motive of the mission, therefore, Lytton decided to despatch simultaneously one or two British officers with similar 'Khuritas' to Nepal and Burma, announcing the Queen's title, and to publish the despatches of all the three missions in the Gazette. *Ibid.*

53. Enclosure in *ibid.*

54. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 May 1876, SalP.

55. *Ibid.*

56. Lytton to Salisbury, 15 July 1876, SalP.; Lytton to Salisbury, 25 May 1876, SalP., also enclosure in *ibid.*

57. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 May 1876, SalP.

most coveted part of Seistan had gone to Persia despite Mayo's assurances to the contrary.<sup>58</sup> For years Sher Ali had been remonstrating against the repeated interference of the British in favour of his rebellious son, Yakub. He was inclined to contrast the notorious failure of the British to recognise the nomination of Abdullah Jan as heir apparent with the civil and courteous letter of Kauffman and his prompt recognition of Abdullah's cause.<sup>59</sup> The northern frontier of Afghanistan had been settled once and for all, and nothing short of a concerted intrigue between two powerful neighbours could have deprived the Amir of his possessions to the north. No such guarantee existed to safeguard the Indian boundary and the Amir was legitimately concerned about British activities at Quetta.<sup>60</sup> In view of all these misgivings, therefore, the presence of a British mission at Kabul could easily be misconstrued. On the other hand, the refusal to accept the mission was to be viewed by the Durbar as a necessary gesture of independence.<sup>61</sup> One cannot, however, fail to appreciate Sher Ali's excellent common sense and his quick eye for the realities of political situations. He had realised that he could not answer the letter of the Commissioner without showing his cards and defining his position one way or another. In order to circumvent such an awkward situation, the Amir sent his reply in two separate documents, one official and the other unofficial, through the Kabul agent.<sup>62</sup> In substance, the Amir refused to receive the envoy, saying that he was quite satisfied with the existing friendly relations and desired no change in them. The agent only developed the theme. The Amir, it was maintained, could not guarantee the safety of the envoy and his companions, and if he admitted a British mission he would have no excuse for refusing to receive a Russian one.

On receipt of the Amir's letter refusing the mission Lytton was faced with a problem whether to take this as his final answer and readjust the frontier policy accordingly, or whether to afford Sher Ali another opportunity of reconsidering his decision.<sup>63</sup> The over-

58. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 May 1876, SalP.

59. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 July 1876, SalP.

60. 'Confidential note on Khelat by the Viceroy', 22 September 1876, LyP. 520/1.

61. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 May 1876, SalP.

62. P.P. Vol. 56, p. 174.

63. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 July 1876, SalP.

riding consideration was the attitude of Salisbury. He was reluctant to look upon Afghanistan as permanently lost. 'The Amir will bear a little more pressing,' he insisted, 'at least a little more explanation of the dangers which attend his present course'.<sup>64</sup> If, however, the Amir finally proved intractable Salisbury would have preferred to turn the Amir's flank by a thorough exploration of western Baluchistan and a firmer grip over the state of Khelat. Such an alternative arrangement, together with telegraphic communication with Teheran through Gwadur, he felt, would do much to reduce the importance of Afghanistan.<sup>65</sup> In view of such divergence of opinion, Lytton felt that the second alternative was both fair to Sher Ali and most advantageous to the Viceroy. But he would not make the offer himself. As the first offer had been rejected, such a 'course of action would have been 'extremely undignified'.<sup>66</sup> Hence the reply was written in the name of Pollock along with a detailed explanation addressed to the Kabul agent.<sup>67</sup> In drafting the letter only the views of Pelly, Bellew, Burne and Colley were taken into consideration.<sup>68</sup> In the Council, Lytton had the consent of Haines,<sup>69</sup> Arbuthnot,<sup>70</sup> Bayley<sup>71</sup> and Clarke,<sup>72</sup> while Hobhouse,<sup>73</sup>

64. Salisbury to Lytton, 7 June 1876, SalP.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 July 1876, SalP.

67. Quoted in full in 'Secret and Political department memoranda', Cap. A. No. 19, p. 70.

68. Lytton to Salisbury, 28 July 1876, SalP.

69. See footnote 6 of the present chapter.

70. Arbuthnot, Sir Alexander John (1822-1907); writer for the East India Company, 1840; first Director of public instruction, Madras, 1855; Vice-chancellor of Madras University, 1871-2, and of Calcutta University, 1878-80; Chief Secretary to Madras Government, 1882; appointed member of Governor-General's Council, 1875; member of India Council, 1885-1901.

71. Bayle, Sir Edward Clive (1821-1884); worked under Foreign Secretary to Indian government; deputy commissioner of Gujarat, 1849, and of Kangra district, 1851; Indian judge, 1859; temporary Foreign Secretary, 1861; Home Secretary, 1862-72; member of the Supreme Council, 1873-78.

72. Clarke, Sir Andrew, (1824-1902); joined Royal Engineers, 1844; Governor of the Straits Settlements, 1873-5; head of the public works department in India, 1877-80.

73. Hobhouse, Arthur, Baron Hobhouse of Hadspen, (1819-1904); judge; law member of Council of Governor-General of India, 1872-7; member of the judicial committee of Privy Council, 1811-1901.

to communicate it to the Amir.<sup>83</sup> The contents of the letter may be summarised as follows: Having regretted the feebleness of the Amir's rule it reminded the Amir that the material proofs of friendship of the British government, so necessary for the consolidation of Afghan power in the person of Sher Ali and his dynasty, could not be 'extended to any state that refused to hold diplomatic intercourse with the Government of India'.<sup>84</sup> He also reminded the Amir that Russia and not Britain had been forbidden by an understanding to send envoys to Afghanistan and that Afghanistan stood to Britain in the same capacity as Kokand to Russia—both a debatable and a seriously disturbing piece of information for Sher Ali. Finally, the Amir was to be given a second opportunity to reconsider his decision regarding Pelly's mission in view of the confidential communication of vital and pressing importance that the envoy was supposed to make. The responsibility for the results was to rest on Sher Ali who was reminded that 'one hand washes another, and that the strong hand of England has not been withdrawn from him until he has rejected its clasp'.<sup>85</sup> Significantly enough, Lytton did not care to get Salisbury's prior approval of the contents of the letter. In justification of his action he claimed that his freedom of action had been sufficiently guaranteed and justified both by the instructions he had brought with him and also by the necessities of his position. If the move was successful, Lytton reassured his chief, 'everyone will be satisfied with the result, and if I fail, it is I think desirable not only in the interests of the Cabinet, but also in those of the Empire that you would be perfectly free to disavow my action'.<sup>86</sup> Significantly enough Salisbury approved of Lytton's stand that he was right in representing to the Amir in serious language the dangerous position he was taking up. It would, he anticipated, dissipate the illusion of Sher Ali 'by showing him that we are in earnest, and that if he does not accept our proffered alliance now, he may not have the chance of getting it at a later period'.<sup>87</sup>

In fact, Lytton had come to the conclusion that the position of the British in Afghanistan was irretrievably lost, that Sher Ali was too far gone to hold back, and that he would again reject the offered

83. Cf. 'Memorandum', A.19, p. 70.

84. Lytton to Salisbury, 29 May 1876, SalP.

85. *Ibid.*

86. Lytton to Salisbury, 5 June 1876, SalP.

87. Salisbury to Lytton, 23 June 1876, SalP.

mission.<sup>88</sup> In his private correspondence and in a semi-official memorandum, Lytton illustrated in great detail what measures he intended to adopt if the second overture failed.<sup>89</sup> These were to include the immediate consolidation of relations with Khelat on a wider basis and the establishment of a permanent British mission in Quetta, the extension of Kashmir territory in the direction of Kafristan, the securing of the Chitral passes, a general manifestation of a more actively favourable disposition towards Persia, and the establishment of a British military station in the Kurram valley, commanding both Kabul and Jalalabad. Lytton attached great importance to the fourth item in the list, for it would have secured British control on the Khyber pass, enabled them to strike right and left with great rapidity across any line of invasion on that part of the frontier and rendered the loss of the Amir's alliance rather 'innocuous to the British'.<sup>90</sup> Lytton was confident that it would not be very difficult to find a pretext for such an act.<sup>91</sup> 'It is monstrous', he reiterated, 'to leave these most important passes in the hands of a turbulent, hostile, aggressive but really weak tribe over whom the Ameer of Kabul neither does nor even can exercise any sort of authority'.<sup>92</sup> Of course, there was always the risk of rousing public opinion in Britain against such a move, and hence Lytton was not prepared to embark upon such a project without the well-considered assent of Salisbury.<sup>93</sup> If the Amir came to terms Lytton added promptly, the Kurran base might be included in the understanding with him, and a clause about slavery, 'which would doubtless have no practical effect in Afghanistan', might be added 'to please our public at home'.<sup>94</sup> These were, in short, the steps which were meant by the phrase 'readjustment of our relations and consolidation of our

88. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 July 1876, SalP.

89. Lytton to Salisbury, 29 May 1875, SalP.; Lytton to Salisbury, 2 July 1876, SalP., and 'Mission to Cabul', minute by Lytton (confidential), 5 July 1876, LyP. 8.

90. Lytton to Salisbury, 29 May 1875, SalP.

91. *Ibid.* Indeed, Lytton considered the direct or indirect possession of all the trans-Indus territory north of Yusufzai and Hazara districts, together with the country about Chitral, a matter of great importance so that 'whether we enter into alliance with Shere Ali or break off relations with him, it must, in my opinion, be done'. 'Mission to Cabul', Minute by Lytton, 5 July 1876, LyP. 8.

92. Lytton to Salisbury, 29 May 1875, SalP.

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*

own interests, without further reference to those of Shere Ali'. Since that phrase had appeared to many of his colleagues to imply a threat of hostility, Lytton felt it convenient in his letter to the Amir to substitute for it a warning that if the Amir rejected the hand of friendship held out to him, he would thereby isolate himself from the British alliance and support.<sup>95</sup> War, Lytton assured his reluctant Secretary of State, was no alternative to inactivity; as a trained diplomat, Lytton was well-versed in the thousand nuances between them.<sup>96</sup> Little did he realise, however, the rigidity of Afghan pride.

The ultimatum, as the letter was viewed in Afghanistan, caused much sensation in Kabul. In particular, it split the Durbar over the issue of the reception of the mission, and the controversy gradually percolated to the traditional 'jirgas' and the Ulema took a keen interest in the implications of the British initiatives.<sup>97</sup> It is difficult to assess the definite composition and strength of the different sets of opinion then current in Afghan politics. But it appears fairly clear that Sher Ali thought it expedient to postpone the reception of the mission. The 'Khurita' of the Indian government had considerable publicity in Afghanistan, and, as a result, a favourable response by the Amir was bound to be given a sinister meaning by the opposition grouped around the romantic personality of Yakub Khan.<sup>98</sup> Already, the conservative elements in the country were suspicious of Sher Ali's connection with the British since the Ambala Conference, and his reforms were reputed to be inspired by the British.<sup>99</sup> Lytton had made his position all the more difficult by his attempt to pressurise him by improving British positions in Quetta<sup>100</sup> and Chitral,<sup>101</sup> and by the extensive military preparations at Peshawar

95. 'Mission to Cabul', Minute by Lytton, 5 July 1876, para. 48, p. 23, LyP/8.

96. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 July 1876, SalP.

97. P.P. Vol. 56, p. 179.

98. Kabul diary, 15 August 1876, *ibid*, p. 177.

99. Kabul diary, 4 July 1876, *ibid*, p. 163.

100. It was decided that Sandeman's troops, which had accompanied his mission, were not being immediately withdrawn and that the Khan was to conclude a new treaty and reaffirm the old one. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 August 1876, SalP.; Stephen to Lytton, 24 August 1876, SteP. Box I. The treaty of Jacobabad was concluded on 8 December 1876.

101. Negotiations with Kashmir and Chitral had been started in order to bring Chitral within the same political circumstances, without recourse to annexation or force, by means of diplomatic arrangements of a friendly and federative character. See Lytton to Salisbury, 20 August 1876, SalP.; also Alder, '*India's frontier etc.*', *op. cit.*, pp. 114-138.

and in the Thal area commanding the much coveted Kurram valley. Obviously, these measures were calculated to exercise a favourable influence over Lytton's 'shy friend',<sup>102</sup> the Amir. Lytton's object was to be able, at a moment's notice, to make an immediate demonstration, sufficient to show that he was in earnest, and that in any sudden emergency he meant to use his troops with or without the Amir's permission.<sup>103</sup> Naturally, the Afghan ruler was in a quandary. After prolonged deliberation, and against the decision of the Durbar, he put forward two alternatives, namely that the British and Afghan representatives should meet at the frontier or that the native agent, Atta Muhammad, might be summoned to Simla for discussion on the whole matter.<sup>104</sup> Lytton had no option but to receive the offer. Strangely enough, he determined to stiffen his position all the same.

Upon the arrival of Atta Muhammad,<sup>105</sup> Lytton was to reshuffle his cards. As Lytton listened to the agent's statement of Sher Ali's views, wishes, fears and difficulties, he became convinced that he was in a position to crush the Amir or set him firmly on his feet if he behaved.<sup>106</sup> 'I really hold the Ameer in the hollow of my hands. If he is such a fool', Lytton was boasting at about the same time, 'as to refuse my terms, the arrangements I shall have concluded at the end of next month or in the course of November with Cashmir and Khelat will have left him in a ring of fence of irons and rendered his alliance unimportant to us'.<sup>107</sup> To the agent, and perhaps, in keeping with the general terms of his policy, he presented a most threatening posture.<sup>108</sup> This included a serious warning that Sher

102. Lytton to Salisbury 12 October 1878, SalP.

103. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 August 1876, SalP. 'The fact that regiments are already marching, fully equipped, from various points in the neighbourhood of our frontier', wrote Lytton, 'would instantly become known beyond the frontier; their numbers would probably be magnified by report and the effect would be very different from that of a mere message informing the Ameer that we intended to march. Probably, while our messenger was still at Cabul, and the Ameer still considering his answer, he would learn with good effect that our troops were actually collected on our frontier'. Lytton to Norman, 5 January 1877, LyP. 518/2, pp. 1-2.

104. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 August 1876, SalP.

105. The agent reached Simla on 6 October and had two sessions with the Viceroy on 11 and 13 October.

106. Lytton to Morley, 24 September 1876, LyP. 522/15, p. 1057; also see Lytton to Salisbury, 12 October 1876, SalP.

107. Lytton to Morley, 24 September 1876, LyP. 522/15, p. 1057.

108. Lytton described Sher Ali, all through the conversation, as 'an earthen pipkin between two iron pots'. P.P. Vol. 56, pp. 184-6.

Ali should break all relations with Kauffman, accept the proposed British mission and come to terms with the Indian government. It was backed by a threat to the effect that the British government would conclude an understanding with Russia at the expense of the sovereignty and territories of Afghanistan if the Amir did not come to a settlement.<sup>109</sup>

Lytton's militant attitude was given a more concrete manifestation in what Pelly said to Noor Muhammad at Peshawar the following February.<sup>110</sup> Lytton had made it plain that the negotiations could proceed only on the condition of Sher Ali's prior assent to the location of British officers on the frontier. In fact, before drawing up the instructions for Pelly, Lytton had submitted before the Council two points. First, the priority of making the Amir's assent to the frontier agencies a *sine qua non* preliminary to the other conditions, and secondly, the precise amount of moral and material support that would be involved in the recognition of Abdullah Jan. On the second point, the Council came to two conclusions unanimously : first, that the recognition of Abdullah Jan, to be of any use to the Amir, ought to involve a reasonable amount of effective support in the event of need ; and secondly, that the Government of India must on no account ever again undertake an Afghan war for the purpose of replacing a deposed sovereign on the throne.<sup>111</sup> Thus, since the prevention of a recurrence of civil war was still the acknowledged policy of the government, it was concluded that the Amir might safely be promised material support in the event of real necessity. It ought to be, as Lytton defined it, 'apparent to our own judgement and under circumstances and conditions such as may render it practically in our power to give the required support with a reasonable prospect of its being efficacious'.<sup>112</sup>

Besides, as regards the subsidy of one lakh to be provided to the Amir annually, it was concluded that the article was to be included in a secret treaty.<sup>113</sup> In view of such 'substantial concessions' Lytton hoped to get a satisfactory *quid pro quo* involving frontier agencies, telegraphic communications, protection of British subjects and an understanding about Afridis. Moreover, the secret treaty was to

109. Lytton to Salisbury, 18 October 1876, SalP.

110. The Peshawar Conference began on 30 January 1877, and was terminated on 15 March 1877.

111. Lytton to Salisbury, 24 October 1876, SalP.

112. *Ibid.*

113. O.T. Burne to Lytton, 22 October 1876, LyP. 519/2.

include such matters as military bases, especially one in the Kurram valley, financial assistance, and a right of troop movement through Afghanistan.<sup>114</sup> Significantly enough, the instructions empowering Pelly to carry out negotiations with the Afghan minister were not to be considered official in the ordinary sense of the term.<sup>115</sup> Lytton was very particular to see that they did not form an enclosure to any official despatch to the Secretary of State on the subject,<sup>116</sup> or be considered matters on which minutes in Council might be conveniently recorded.<sup>117</sup>

Certainly, Lytton had scarcely any hope for the success of the negotiations. The stipulation of frontier agencies, as a preliminary to negotiations, for example, was unknown to Sher Ali even at the time of the second letter of the Commissioner of Peshawar. Even Pelly, who was to confront the arguments of Noor Muhammad, felt despondent as to its outcome. He had desired that everything, both in matters of principle and of detail, should be left to him to settle with the Amir's envoy. In particular, he held that the Amir would not accept agents on the frontier under the proposed conditions.<sup>118</sup> Lytton would not have it. He was unwilling to start any public negotiations in the dark. To do so, he emphasised, was 'to fling away the advantages (and they seem to me considerable) which have been derived from the cross-examination of the native agent'.<sup>119</sup> Lytton was convinced that the Amir's alienation from the British was complete. The Amir, he argued, was already half-way into the arms of the Russians. 'If the present ambiguous situation was indefinitely prolonged', Lytton was to add, the Amir would soon be right into them completely, and in that case 'he will entangle in their embrace a portion of our own garment, which there is still time to withdraw from his clinch'.<sup>120</sup> Hence, Lytton was inclined to think that by washing his hands of the Amir altogether and 'letting him go to pieces', he would have a better chance of consolidating a firm

114. Lytton to Salisbury, 18 October 1876, LyP. 518/1.

115. Lytton to Norman, 19 October 1876, LyP. 518/1; also Lytton to Salisbury, 30 October 1876, SalP.

116. Lytton to Salisbury, 24 October 1876, SalP.; also 'Review of the Instructions to Pelly prior to Peshawar Conference', 4 November 1876, No. 164, LyP. 519/3.

117. Lytton to Norman, 29 October 1876, LyP. 518/1.

118. Lytton to Salisbury, 18 October 1876, LyP. 518/1.

119. Lytton to Salisbury, 23 February 1877, LyP. 518/2, p. 130.

120. Lytton to Salisbury, 16 February 1877, LyP. 518/2, p. 130.

Afghan alliance with someone else.<sup>121</sup> He was anticipating a considerable troubling of waters in Kabul in which he might catch a better fish.<sup>122</sup> As matters stood then, if the Amir agreed to negotiate at all, he would have been precluded from breaking off negotiations on the one paramount condition of all, the frontier agency. His refusal to negotiate on these conditions would be a convincing proof of the dangers of negotiating with a thoroughly ill-disposed man without any previous bases.<sup>123</sup>

Thus Lytton seemed unwilling to make any substantial concession to the Amir. If the Afghan minister proved adamant, Lytton was willing to consider such minor points as the return of Afghan refugees or a personal subsidy to Noor Muhammad for his services.<sup>124</sup> But the right of passage through Afghanistan for British troops was insisted upon as an indispensable clause and in return the Amir was to be compensated, upon a successful campaign, by the extension of territory northwards.<sup>125</sup> If there was to be any admissible compromise on the agency stipulation, the only one that occurred to him was a treaty clause publicly acknowledging and affirming a right to send British agents into Afghanistan, and simultaneously binding the Amir not to receive agents from any other power, coupled with a private understanding that this right was to remain in abeyance for some time.<sup>126</sup>

It is only in the light of the above discussion that the instructions to Pelly can be appreciated. In fact, Lytton had entered into highly confidential details in his instructions and little room was left for Pelly's independent initiative. In his report to the Secretary of State, Lytton was to find himself upon uncertain ground. 'If all his [Pelly's] i's are not dotted and his t's crossed carefully beforehand', he wrote apologetically, 'Pelly is apt to dot and cross the wrong letters'.<sup>127</sup>

121. Lytton to Salisbury, 18 October 1876, SalP.; Lytton to Salisbury, 22 October 1876, SalP.

122. Lytton to Salisbury, 23 February 1877, SalP.

123. Lytton to Salisbury, 16 February 1877, LyP. 518/2, p. 130.

124. Lytton to Salisbury, 18 October 1876, SalP.; Lytton to Pelly, 27 January 1876, LyP. 518/2.

125. *Ibid.*

126. Lytton to Salisbury, 16 February 1877, LyP. 518/2; Lytton to Salisbury, 30 October 1876, SalP.

127. Lytton to Salisbury, 16 February 1877, LyP. 518/2.

All through the course of the negotiations with Pelly the Afghan envoy sought to prove the unreliable nature of a British alliance as borne out by earlier experiences, the enormous price that the Amir was then called upon to pay for it, and the sincerity of Sher Ali.<sup>128</sup> His chief argument had been that an agent should not be forced upon the Amir and that the right of troop movement was incompatible with the independence and integrity of Afghanistan. In view of Lytton's change of tone since the inception of the conference at Peshawar, the envoy felt it necessary to consult his master in Kabul. But before any fresh instructions could arrive, Noor Muhammad fell ill and died, and Pelly was authorised to close the protracted negotiations.<sup>129</sup> On his own admission, it appears that Lytton was aware that the Amir intended to despatch a new set of instructions authorising the envoy to accept the agency clause *in toto* as a last resort.<sup>130</sup> While authorising Pelly to terminate the negotiation he had drawn up a long list of instances of Sher Ali's misbehaviour, his duplicity and evil intentions.<sup>131</sup> It concluded with instructions to Pelly to terminate the talks if the envoy failed to concede both the right of passage to the British in times of war and the right to erect a cantonment in Jalalabad. It is small wonder that Lady Balfour omitted the relevant section of the instructions in the official history of Lytton's administration, much to the confusion of later historians.<sup>132</sup>

The primary accusation of the Viceroy had been the rumours of anti-British agitation inspired by the Amir both in Afghanistan and in the border country, and the general mobilisation of religious feeling with a view to inaugurating a 'jehad' against the infidels. In his private correspondence, Lytton, however, was not disposed to attribute the disturbances on the Peshawar border to the inspiration of the Amir.<sup>133</sup>

128. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 February 1877, SalP.; Lytton to Salisbury, 16 February 1877, SalP. P.P. Vol. 56, p. 195; P.S.D.E. from India, Vol. 114, pp. 112-22.

129. Lytton to Pelly, 4 March 1877, PelP.

130. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 April 1877, SalP.

131. Lytton to Pelly, 3 March 1877, P.S.D.E. from India, Vol. 14, p. 122.

132. E.E. Balfour, '*Lord Lytton's Indian Administration*', London, 1899, p. 112. Also cf. Betty Balfour's '*Personal and literary letters of Robert, First earl of Lytton*', Vol. II, London, 1906, pp. 56-7, for a similar misinterpretation. She maintains that Pelly broke off the conference on the ground that if the acceptance of 'a British officer somewhere in Afghanistan' as a basis of discussion was not accepted, he had no authority to open negotiations.

133. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 February 1877, SalP.

As for the reported intention of Sher Ali to proclaim a 'jehad', Lytton seemed determined to turn a blind eye for he was convinced that the Amir was himself frightened.<sup>134</sup> There were authentic reports of Sher Ali's serious intentions of resuming the conference and his disgust over Noor Muhammad's handling of his cards.<sup>135</sup> The Khan of Khelat also supported the Amir's desire for a resumption of the negotiations, with promises of a favourable response.<sup>136</sup> But Lytton had made up his mind. The conference could not be resumed because the Amir's desire was to prolong it only to make preparations for hostilities. 'I cannot help thinking it fortunate', Lytton wrote emphatically, 'that the Ameer was such a fool as to throw away the opportunity we offered him'. 'Had he at once accepted the agency condition we should have been obliged to give him the Treaty of alliance and dynastic guarantee—and I doubt if even the agency clause would have been a sufficient security for his good behaviour. I would not certainly recommend the renewal of that offer now'.<sup>137</sup> As for reopening the conference, Lytton would expect the Amir to state his terms in advance and apologise for his bad conduct.<sup>138</sup> His attitude was crystallised by the time the Turkish envoy arrived in Kabul—the result of a successful conspiracy between Lytton and Layard. In case the Turkish mission resulted in an overture by the Amir, Lytton was determined to demand more and offer less.<sup>139</sup> In fact Sher Ali could, he had concluded, no longer be entertained.<sup>140</sup> It was time to let the Amir stew in his own juice.<sup>141</sup> Lytton's opinion

134. *Ibid.*

135. Lytton to Salisbury, 5 April 1877, SalP.; Lytton to Salisbury, 10 May 1877, SalP.

136. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 April 1877, SalP.

137. *Ibid.*

138. Lytton to Egerton, 10 April 1877, SalP.

139. He would, for example, insist not merely on an agent with large escort, but also the right to maintain British troops, both in Kabul and Kandahar. He would no longer offer a defensive-offensive treaty or dynastic guarantee. Merv might still be offered but conditional upon payment of a lump sum and good behaviour. Lytton to Salisbury, 30 June 1877, SalP.

140. 'By getting rid of Shere Ali, we shall get rid of his Russian engagements whatever they may be; and, if no such engagements exist, we shall at least get rid of his Russian proclivities and of those personal characteristics peculiar to himself which constitute, at present, the greatest obstruction to our efficient control over his external policy'. Lytton to Salisbury, 5 April 1877, SalP.

141. *Ibid.*

remained unchanged. He was convinced that he would never succeed in concluding a satisfactory arrangement with Sher Ali, that the partial success of any fresh effort in that direction might be a source of future embarrassment to the British, and that the best thing that could happen would be the speedy fall of the Amir from power.<sup>142</sup>

The basis of Lytton's new offensives consisted in his interpretation of the structure of Sher Ali's authority in Afghanistan. He was, Lytton concluded, miserably ill-equipped and ill-organised to offer any sustained resistance to intrigues and internal strife, which Lytton was now eager to finance and manipulate.<sup>143</sup> Hence he concluded that the position of the Amir was very weak and rickety, that his army, though 'really a good one', was by European standards third-rate.<sup>144</sup> Its size, for one, was out of proportion to the resources of the country and its pay was in arrears. 'The useless army would become,' Lytton believed, 'a source of embarrassment to him and I think it highly probable that before long there would be a troubling of waters at Cabul'.<sup>145</sup> Besides he had reason to believe that a strong feeling of disaffection towards the Amir was increasing from Kandahar northwards towards Herat while his fresh measures of taxation were setting his own people against him.<sup>146</sup> On the basis of such assumptions, Lytton felt confident that the position would be infinitely improved if he made it clearly known throughout Afghanistan that the British had withdrawn all responsibility on behalf of the Amir, whatever might happen to him.<sup>147</sup> He anticipated that the Amir's power would not survive the open withdrawal of British protection for many months and that he, Lytton, would soon find much more advantageous conditions under his successor.<sup>148</sup> Thus, the only respectable position to take in the shifting currents of Afghan politics was, Lytton urged upon the Secretary of State, 'to stand firm as a rock among eddies, not flinching an inch from the position we have assumed and which seems to me safe and dignified'.<sup>149</sup> Lytton prophesied rather optimistically the outcome of his dynamic waiting

142. Lytton to Cavagnari, 20 June 1877, LyP. 311/2.

143. 'Memorandum on Southern Afghanistan' by St. John, 17 July 1878, LyP. 8.

144. Lytton to Salisbury, 23 February 1877, SalP.

145. Lytton to Salisbury, 5 April 1877, SalP.

146. *Ibid.*

147. Lytton to Salisbury, 23 February 1877, SalP.

148. *Ibid.*

149. Lytton to Salisbury, 2 March 1877, SalP.

attempts to save his own skin.<sup>159</sup> His correspondence with the mother of Abdullah Jan had convinced him that Sher Ali would soon be poisoned.<sup>160</sup> 'If the Ameer', he wrote, 'is not murdered within the next six months he will be obliged to employ the large army he has collected for holy war'.<sup>161</sup>

There was, however, another significant aspect of the new deal in Afghanistan. Lytton had always emphasised the need for a scientific frontier. The only reason for the extension of British influence and power beyond the 'mountain wall' was a conviction that under existing conditions that wall was utterly useless for all military purposes. The defence of India depended, he argued, upon the command of the passes through it on both sides. If the Afghan alliance did not give him such a control, Lytton was determined to obtain this by means of improved relations with the adjoining tribes and chiefs<sup>162</sup> then owing a loose allegiance to the Amir of Kabul.<sup>163</sup> It had been a grave mistake, Lytton wrote, to let the Amir suppose that 'all our eggs are in his basket, and secondly, we have omitted to keep such a basketful of eggs under our own arms'.<sup>164</sup> It was time to rectify this error and Lytton saw no better way of doing so than by a redistribution of the eggs.

Thus, serious negotiations were opened with Kashmir, Chitral and Yassin with a view to organising an anti-Afghan front in Badakshan and northern Afghanistan.<sup>165</sup> The cry of a threat of a jihad from Kabul was raised by Kashmir under Lytton's inspiration to cover up the Maharaja's movement of troops towards the Afghan frontier. If, as a consequence, any aggression did take place on Kashmiri territory, Lytton was ready to take advantage of it by stepping in to sweep up the Swat valley and secure a strong position on the right flank of Sher Ali.<sup>166</sup> Further

159. Lytton to Salisbury, 17 April 1877, SalP.

160. Lytton to Cavagnari, 30 July 1877, LyP. 518/2, p. 727. Lytton was eager to convince the Queen that it would hardly help her much to poison the Amir unless she poisoned Yakub simultaneously. 'Message to Abdulla Jan's mother', LyP. 518/2, p. 728.

161. Lytton to Layard, 10 July 1877, LayP, 39164, p. 8.

162. Lytton to Layard, 4 June 1877, LyP. 518/2.

163. Lytton to Cavagnari, 9 June 1877, LyP. 518/2, p. 465.

164. Lytton to Layard, 4 June 1877, LyP. 518/2.

165. For negotiations with Kashmir see Lytton to Salisbury, 12 April 1877, SalP. and enclosure in the same, 'Foreign Secretary to Viceroy, 10 April 1877', giving substance of Henderson's negotiations.

166. Lytton to Cavagnari, 12 February 1878, LyP. 519/VII.

to the south, the semi-independent chiefship of Dir was to provide a stronghold of British loyalty. The death of the Akhund of Swat had offered a favourable opportunity to entertain the friendly overtures of its ambitious ruler, Rahmatullah.<sup>167</sup> Immediately upon the conclusion of the Peshawar Conference, Lytton had informed these states that the British government desired their independence and did not recognise the Amir's present claim on their allegiance.<sup>168</sup> It was also decided to recognise and assist Rahmatullah in order to enable him to become the principal chief in the countries north of the Peshawar frontier, and to grant smaller allowances to the chiefs of Bajaur, Swat, etc., provided they agreed to act in subordination to the chief of Dir.<sup>169</sup> Besides, Rahmatullah was encouraged to annex the Utman Khail and the Ramzai areas, and military assistance was promised, if it was needed.<sup>170</sup> The establishment of favourable relations with Dir, it was felt, would enable the British to command the route through Dir and Chitral to the frontier of Badakshan. If British influence was once established in Dir and Chitral, Lytton was to argue, the Amir would find his hold over the dependencies on the north-eastern frontier considerably weakened.<sup>171</sup> Lytton delighted in such a prospect. 'Such measures would be most unpalatable to the Ameer', he wrote, 'more so even than the arrangements we have made with the Khan of Khelat'.<sup>172</sup>

Thirdly, direct negotiations with the trans-frontier tribes were entered into in order to detach them from Kabul's control. The policy hitherto followed regarding the frontier tribes was to regard them as the 'political property of the Ameer of Cabul', with a view to making him responsible for their conduct.<sup>173</sup> In Lytton's opinion, the time was ripe for a complete reversal of policy, which ought to be carried out with caution and foresight.<sup>174</sup> It was argued that any improvement of relations with Naoroz Khan and others would have

167. For negotiations with Dir, Swat and Bajour, see Lytton to Salisbury, 25 April 1877, SalP.; Lytton to Cavagnari, 9 June 1877, LyP. 518/2; Lytton to Cavagnari, 30 June 1877, LyP. 518/2; Lytton to Cavagnari, 27 January 1878, LyP. 519/VII, No. 48, and Lytton to Cavagnari, 12 February 1878, LyP. 519/VII,

168. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 April 1877, SalP.

169. Lytton to Cavagnari, 9 June 1877, LyP. 518/2.

170. Lytton to Cavagnari, 12 February 1878, LyP. 519/VII.

171. *Ibid.*

172. Lytton to Cavagnari, 27 January 1878, LyP. 519/VII.

173. Lytton to Cavagnari, 9 June 1877, LyP. 518/2.

174. *Ibid.*

rendered reconciliation with the Amir impossible.<sup>175</sup> And such a reconciliation, Lytton held, was no longer acceptable. Hence, assuming that the distant aim of his policy was not to consolidate but to disintegrate Kabul power, Lytton was to write, 'I don't think this matters'.<sup>176</sup>

Finally, towards the southern flank of Afghanistan, the Khan of Khelat was called upon to enter into a new treaty with larger scope. As a result, the British base in Quetta was enlarged and consolidated<sup>177</sup> and encouragement was given to the tribes of Sibi to enter into direct alliance with the British. The Amir was informed of the disinclination of Lytton to protect his interests at Sibi against the aggression of the Murrees.<sup>178</sup> Meanwhile, reconnaissance parties under Major Browne were sent over to survey and explore the Thal-Chotali route through the dominion of Sher Ali.<sup>179</sup> Haines was apprehensive of the strength of the British establishment in Quetta and of the disastrous effects of a probable military failure there.<sup>180</sup> Lytton viewed the situation differently. He was convinced that the result of a military failure in Quetta or any temporarily successful

175. *Ibid.*

176. Of the frontier chiefs with whom Lytton entered into negotiations the most important was Naoroz Khan, by means of whom he desired to bring the Mohmands as far as Lalpura under British influence. It was hoped that if Naoroz were re-established in power at Lalpura and had sufficient money, he would manage to work through Yakub Khan's mother to get up a demonstration at Kabul in favour of her son and that the first symptoms of any disaffection at Kabul or in any other part of Afghanistan would rapidly grow to such an extent that Sher Ali would be sure to fall. Lalpura was an integral part of Kabul. This had been recognised frequently, notably in the case of Major Macdonald's murder for which Naoroz Khan had been punished by the Amir and had been deposed from Khanship. Lytton was aware that in case of reconciliation with the Amir, the Amir would do all he could to overthrow the chiefs who had abandoned him. Hence, he took special care to inform the chiefs that the British government intended to keep the fringe thoroughly independent of the Kabul government and under the direct management of the British. The *status quo* so far as these areas were concerned, could never be restored. Cavagnari to Lytton, 5 June 1877, LyP. 519/V, No. 45; Egerton to Lytton, 8 June 1877, LyP. 519/V, No. 42.

177. Salisbury to Lytton, 25 October 1877, SalP.; Lytton to F. Haines, 31 July 1877, and 5 August 1877, LyP. 518/2.

178. Lytton to Salisbury, 25 April 1877, SalP.

179. Lytton to Aitchison, 13 December 1877, LyP. 518/2, p. 1077-8.

180. Lytton to Haines, 5 August LyP. 518/2, p. 704.

attack upon the British garrison there by the Amir must infallibly be followed by a successful invasion of Afghanistan and the permanent occupation of western Afghanistan.<sup>181</sup> In fact, Lytton had already thought out a scheme for separating western and southern Afghanistan from Kabul and of organising them, together with Merv, into a separate principality.<sup>182</sup> A military operation to achieve this would have cost the Indian exchequer, according to Lytton's calculations, about two million sterling. But the preservation of the Indian Empire was worth more than many million sterling. Whether the British Parliament and public like it or not, Lytton asserted, in open defiance to Salisbury, 'we must bring, by hook or by crook, both Candahar and Herat completely under our own control as speedily as possible'.<sup>183</sup> The only question which concerned Lytton was whether Kandahar and Herat were necessary for the preservation of the Indian Empire. 'The Government of India', Lytton was to pontificate, 'thinks that they are'.<sup>184</sup>

Thus, by the end of 1877, Lytton had made considerable strides towards insulating Sher Ali, both internally and externally. Burne, his private secretary, in no way an advocate of inactivity, had urged upon him, on the termination of the Peshawar conference, the virtues of a relatively cautious policy rather than the one that had been envisaged. He thought that unless Lytton had some very strong reasons to the contrary it was best to let the Afghan relations of the Government of India slide temporarily. 'Your present game', Burne wrote, 'is to rest a bit on the battlefield—to survey what has been done, to strike afresh after seeing the effect of the conference, which is not seen yet'.<sup>185</sup> It was argued, in particular, that Lytton's plan ought to be applied after having allowed the Amir time to assess his position more closely. Cavagnari had similar misgivings.<sup>186</sup>

181. 'Were the British garrison now at Quetta actually attacked by the Ameer's troops, and were the attack in any degree successful, it would be beyond the power of the Secretary of State, however severely he might blame the Indian Government for having provoked such an assault, to forbid or restrain the Indian Government from avenging it.' *Ibid.*, p. 705.
182. Lytton to Salisbury, 13 July 1877, SalP. Lytton to Cavagnari, 30 June 1877, LyP. 518/2, pp. 548-9.
183. Lytton to Salisbury, 20 July 1877, SalP.
184. *Ibid.*

185. Burne to Lytton, 9 April 1877, No. 127, LyP. 519/4; Burne to Lytton, 10 April 1877, No. 128, LyP. 510/4.
186. Cavagnari to Lytton, 5 June 1877, No. 45, LyP. 519/V.

Salisbury viewed withdrawal of the native agent as unfortunate and made it amply clear that any attempt to coerce Afghanistan within its own dominions would not be supported.<sup>187</sup> The impression in London was that a military expedition to Afghanistan was not worth the candle. Lytton would have nothing to do with such a proposition. He was extremely impatient with any makeshift arrangement in dealing with what he considered a fundamental evil. If the Amir was not amenable to an offensive-defensive alliance against the Russian bear, Lytton would cease to consider him a useful ally of any consequence, and if Sher Ali, having received British assistance, failed to co-operate with the military logistics of the Empress of India, Lytton would not let him go unpunished. In short, Lytton would not allow Sher Ali to enjoy the dignity of a neutral power. Of course, none of his contemporaries would have conceded to Afghanistan such an honourable role, especially in view of her vital position on the map, her 'inferior' civilisation, and the ambitious prospects of the British Empire. Lytton added to these characteristics of his age the visions of a romantic poet and those of an optimist. His reactions, naturally, were keener and sharper than those of his contemporaries. So far as India was concerned, Lytton thought that one could not do better than follow the example of the Russian government, which, trusting in the strength of *fait accompli*, 'whilst secretly allowing the agent to go ahead, does not scruple to disavow the action of its agents when it can no longer be undone'.<sup>188</sup> He had urged the Secretary of State to adopt a similar course of action if it became necessary. 'Such an arrangement might in every conceivable circumstance be very convenient to us: for on the one hand it would enable us to stand against a Parliamentary check at home, whilst on the other it would enable us to make our point on the frontier here...'<sup>189</sup>

The anticipated fall of Sher Ali, however, did not come about. The internal revolution in Afghanistan that Lytton so dearly longed for remained as distant as ever. In the meantime, he had failed to move the Home government to neutralise the realities presented by the Russian operation on Kizzil Arvat. It was all the more evident now that the future of Merv would never force the Cabinet at home

187. Salisbury to Lytton, 17 April 1877, SalP.

188. Lytton to Salisbury, 5 April 1877, SalP.

189. *Ibid.*

into action. Lytton was desperate. All through the summer of 1878 the viceregal entourage waited patiently for an excuse for direct intervention.<sup>190</sup> Once such a pretext was offered by the reception of the Russian envoy at Kabul,<sup>191</sup> Lytton moved. It was a resolute and spectacular move.

190. Colley to Pelly, 1 September 1878, Pelp.

191. On June 14 1878, General Stolietoff left Samarkand bearing letters from

Kauffman for Kabul. Sher Ali received the Russian agent with every token of regard and cordiality. It was on 7 June 1878, that India first heard of the intended Russian mission to Kabul. On the 26th of the same month Salisbury called the attention of the Foreign Office to the matter, and it protested to Russia against their breach of assurance. In response to the British representations, M. de Giers, the Russian Ambassador, on 2 July 1878, flatly denied that any such mission had been or was intended to be sent to Kabul, either by the Russian p. 131-132. government or by General Kauffman. P.P. Central Asia, No. I (1878),

## 6

## The Mission of Chamberlain

Lytton's principal object upon the reception of the Russian mission at Kabul was to turn its presence to the advantage of the British. For more than a year he had been looking for a reasonable pretext for action. As the Russian general made his way to Kabul, Lytton decided to force the crisis. He had never anticipated that the Russians would ever be 'so foolish as to throw the game completely into my hands'<sup>1</sup>, and he determined to put his plan into operation. Evidently, Lytton was inclined to agree with the Home government that the mission was sent under a threat of war and that, once withdrawn, it would cease to have any larger consequence.<sup>2</sup> But what concerned him most in India was not the course of action into which he was thus provoked, but the effect of it throughout Central Asia, where apologies and explanations would have counted for nothing even if they were made known. 'The fulcrum of the position we have to displace', Lytton wrote, 'is not at St. Petersburg but at Kabul. Russian action, so conspicuous and effective as this, could only be counteracted by British action—equally resolute and prompt.'<sup>3</sup> Naturally he was in no mood to view the case as one for recriminations and remonstrances. On the contrary, Lytton argued, it demanded practical remedies, for the fundamental problem 'was not to deal with Afghanistan through Russia but Russia through Afghanistan'.<sup>4</sup> The reception of General Stolietoff by the Amir was accordingly interpreted by the Viceroy as a 'public affront in the face of all Asia and all India'.<sup>5</sup> Till that humiliation had been publicly

1. Lytton to Cranbrook, 7 August 1878, LyP. 578 (3).

2. Lytton to Cranbrook, 12 August 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

3. Lytton to Cranbrook, 12 August 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

4. *Ibid.*

5. Lytton to Cranbrook, 8 September 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

removed Lytton was determined not to solicit any amicable negotiation with Sher Ali. A remonstrance against Russia, he argued, would be a proper accompaniment to the material demonstration of British power. But, as an isolated move, it was worthless. Diplomacy with St. Petersburg should be, and Lytton was very emphatic on this point, subsidiary to, and not in substitution for, action in Afghanistan, and the purpose of such an action was to be the re-establishment of predominant British influence in Kabul and the exclusion of the agents of other powers.<sup>6</sup>

On the surface, Lytton's position seemed a strong one. He could point to the 'blatant lie' in which the Russians appeared to be proficient.<sup>7</sup> Even on 3 July 1878 M. de Giers did not hesitate to assure Loftus, the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, that no Russian mission to Kabul had ever been authorised or even contemplated. Yet at that very moment a Russian general had been crossing the river Oxus on his way to Kabul.<sup>8</sup> It was also held by the Viceroy that immediate action was necessary as the Persians were being instigated by Russia to pick a quarrel with Afghanistan in order to occupy Herat. Such a move by Persia would have enabled Russia to overrun the Akhal country undisturbed, thus commanding Herat, covering Merv and simultaneously dealing with Balkh and Maimena while Herat itself would be held for her by a 'virtual vassal state'.<sup>9</sup> Little did the Indian Viceroy realise that he was gradually being led into a trap laid by Russian diplomacy.

It was apparent that the Russian and the Afghan territories were soon to become coterminous along the Upper Oxus and throughout the northern frontier of Afghanistan. It was also evident that Merv would soon be occupied by the Russians and that they would make great exertions to establish permanent communications between their Caspian and Turkistan bases through the valley of Atrek and along the northern frontier of Persia.<sup>10</sup> From the attitude of the Foreign Office it was clear that the British government was favourably disposed towards such moves on the part of Russia. Obviously, the first consideration of the Viceroy ought to have been to determine whether a demand for the expulsion of Russian influence

6. *Ibid.*

7. Lytton to Cranbrook, 31 August 1878, LyP. 51P (3).

8. *Ibid.*

9. Lytton to Cranbrook, 12 August 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

10. Loftus to Derby, 16 July 1878, from Russia/1874-1878, DerP.

from Afghanistan could be supplemented by a guarantee that 'we shall', as Lyall put it bluntly, 'protect the Afghan frontier against any invasion, whenever the Amir summons us to his aid'.<sup>11</sup> Such a guarantee of the existing territories of Afghanistan ought to have included the political unit of Badakshan and Wakhan. The disadvantages of an arrangement on these lines were obvious. 'If we are bound to defend the country', Derby had correctly pointed out, 'we are bound to regulate its affairs'.<sup>12</sup> This would have involved a protectorate demanding grave responsibility and financial burden. Thus a more rational and surer means of achieving the object would have been to ask Russia to join in a contract over Afghanistan following the example of the Belgium treaty. 'It seems to me plain that the English,' wrote Lyall, 'and not the Ameer, must undertake to induce Russia not to force diplomatic relations on Cabul. The Ameer can only oppose and decline advances, and protest diplomatically, if his hand is again forced'.<sup>13</sup> In fact by taking the initiative Lytton was playing the game of Kauffman. Since the assassination of Lord Mayo the Russian lobby in the Afghan Durbar had been in the ascendancy. The Governor of Tashkent had been playing on the hopes and aspirations of the Amir without any recourse to positive overtures for alliance<sup>14</sup>, such being prohibited under the terms of the Anglo-Russian understanding of 1873. The gradual decline of the Ambala spirit was looked upon with satisfaction by Kauffman, who was kept informed of the temper of the Kabul Durbar by a chain of native agencies operating between Kabul and the Uzbeg court of Bukhara.<sup>15</sup> The mission of General Stolietoff encouraged the Amir to resist British aggression with lofty promises of assistance both military as well as diplomatic. In the hour of crisis, however, they retreated into the heartland of Russia while the Amir's intended flight to St. Petersburg upon the military successes of the Indian army at Kurram and Khyber was ordered to be halted at Tashkent. Kauffman must have been very happy at pinning the British down in a war

11. A.C. Lyall, 'Memorandum on the instructions for the Mission', 30 August 1878, LyIP.

12. Derby's speech, 8 May 1874, Hansard, third series, Vol. 230, p. 1650.

13. Lyall, 'Memo' on the mission, 30 August 1878, LyIP.

14. Cf. 'A memorandum on the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan, written by Qazi Abdul-i-Qadir, an Afghan of Peshawar and addressed to Government', September 1882, for an interesting account of General Stolietoff at Kabul. LyIP.

15. Lytton to Cranbrook, 31 August 1873, LyP. 518 (3).

with Kabul. It was British involvement in Afghanistan that might have provided the Russians with an excuse to strike a bargain over Badakshan and Wakhan, and even Chitral might, by an accidental turn of fortune, have fallen into Russian hands !

The course of action that Lytton proposed consisted of a counter-mission to Afghanistan to demand the cessation of relations with Russia and the dismissal of her mission as the preliminary condition to the opening of friendly negotiations.<sup>16</sup> If the proposal was declined, Lytton was to march upon Kabul immediately. His programme for action in such circumstances appeared to be very simple. It was to establish, as Lytton put it dramatically, 'two small blisters on the head and foot of the Ameer—one on the Kurram valley and the second at Quetta and Candahar, each close to our frontier and practically unassailable by the Afghan race.'<sup>17</sup> These two operations would have employed few troops and probably would have involved no fighting at all. But Lytton had fixed his eye on Kabul. Thus if the mission was declined, he was determined to advance on Kabul via Peshawar. The alternative route via the Bolan to Kandahar, he wrote, would be for his purpose long and circuitous.<sup>18</sup> The frontier administration had succeeded in securing the support of the Khyberis and it was believed that the co-operation of the Yusufzais, the Ghilzais and the Kakars could be relied upon.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Lytton expected the mission to be declined. If, however, the Russians made a counter-attack then Lytton would have gone to Bamia, and if the Persians seized Herat the Persian Gulf was to be vigorously attacked.<sup>20</sup> In short, in Lytton's scheme of things, Sher Ali was to be 'a dwarf (in Goldsmith's story) who got all the wounds and we, the giants, who got all the glory without a scratch.'<sup>21</sup>

In fact, Lytton had made up his mind not to make any fresh overtures to the Amir.<sup>22</sup> Such a course of action was no longer feasible in view of the territorial gains that Lytton obviously had in mind. There were, however, considerable misgivings in some

16. Lytton to Cranbrook, 8 September 1878, LyP. 518 (3).  
 17. Lytton to Cranbrook, 31 September 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Ibid.*

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. Lytton to Cranbrook, 4 January 1878, SalP.

quarters as to Lytton's bellicosity. It was held that Sher Ali ought to be dealt with, no matter what had happened with regard to the Russian mission. It was also maintained, in support of such a line of thinking, that Sher Ali was the only man in Afghanistan who was capable of holding the country together; that if he fled to Russia Kauffman might use him as a possible pretender in order to keep the Afghan issue alive, and that any alternative ruler would have to be actively supported by the British for sheer maintenance and thus Lytton might be committed to much inconvenient interference in the internal affairs of Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> Evidently, Lytton had no sympathy for such ideas. He had urged Salisbury, during the course of the Congress of Berlin, to take the opportunity to effect with Russia some explicit understanding on the general question of Central Asia.<sup>24</sup> He was aware that a united Afghanistan was impossible without Sher Ali. But the results of the Peshawar conference had convinced him that Sher Ali was absolutely estranged and, looking purely from the viewpoint of the Government of India, Lytton saw no satisfaction in a solution through the Amir.<sup>25</sup> 'If our understanding with the strong ruler of a strong state is not and cannot be made permanently satisfactory,' he wrote, 'then the stronger the ruler the weaker will be the securities and the greater the danger of any arrangements exclusively confined to such an understanding.'<sup>26</sup> Hence, Lytton argued, it would be more in the interests of India to see those dominions placed under separate authorities than on any terms of an alliance with Sher Ali. Thus, if an alliance with Sher Ali was out of the question, Lytton was left with three alternatives : the annexation of the whole country, the creation of a regime at Kabul, and finally, the disintegration of the country into small independent entities. As to the first, Lytton was apprehensive of 'raising the whole country against ourselves'.<sup>27</sup> As regards the second, Lytton was strongly opposed to the idea of a puppet ruler supported by British guns. He would never allow a repetition of the Shah Suja experiment in Afghanistan.<sup>28</sup> On the contrary, he would prefer to bless three or four men ruling

23. 'Memo' by Viceroy for circulation among the members of the Council, 5 September 1878. StrP.

24. Lytton to J. Strachey, 24 October 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

25. 'Mission to Kabul', minute by the Viceroy, (undated), LyP. 7.

26. Lytton to J. Strachey, 4 October 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

27. 'Memo by Viceroy for circulation', 5 September 1878. StrP.

28. *Ibid*; Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

those areas, in which 'they have some local roots of their own'.<sup>29</sup> It was this third solution that had captured his imagination. In his private correspondence Lytton defined the objectives of his policy very closely. It meant the creation upon the north-western frontier, he wrote, 'of a power or powers—born friendly to the British interest, capable of maintaining their domestic authorities without the incessant exaction of our material support against the hostility of their subjects in their internal affairs, but necessarily, willingly and permanently as regards their foreign relations, subordinate to the permanent supremacy of the British influence and control; such subordinate friendly powers to occupy and hold in our interest, the whole of the territories now ruled by Sher Ali'.<sup>30</sup> In short, it was to the disintegration of Afghanistan that he was now to turn his eyes. The political unit of Afghanistan, Lytton maintained, was an artificial product of recent origins. The natural tendency of its component parts was centrifugal rather than centripetal.<sup>31</sup> He was, therefore, to reckon on the co-operation of the native force for the dissolution of the authority of Sher Ali. The creation of new centres of political gravity and the distribution of power among them, Lytton felt, ought to be left to the process of natural selection. This would ensure, Lytton thought, that the right man found himself in the right place, and 'if the right man gets into the right place a very moderate amount of material support upon our part, if coupled with a frank, friendly and intelligible policy, will probably suffice to keep him there'.<sup>32</sup>

It was in keeping with the general policy of the disintegration of Afghanistan that Lytton drafted his instruction to the proposed mission.<sup>33</sup> By the end of July 1878, he had received directives from the Home government to consider the relationship between Afghanistan and Calcutta as a matter of local interest and to deal with it accordingly.<sup>34</sup> Lytton saw in the directives considerable freedom of action.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly, he authorised the mission to demand from the Amir three concessions: the retirement of the

29. *Ibid.*

30. Lytton to J. Strachey, 24 October 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

31. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

32. 'Memo by the Viceroy for circulation', 5 September 1878, StrP.

33. Lytton to Cranbrook, 8 September 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

34. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 15 July 1878, SalP.

35. Lytton to Cranbrook, 16 August 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

Russian mission, a promise never to receive another, and the acceptance of a British mission in Kabul and consulates on the Afghan frontiers. In return, Lytton was willing to offer a guarantee to Afghanistan against Russia.<sup>36</sup> Such demands were bound to be declined by the Amir. Sher Ali would certainly have refused to dismiss the Russians unconditionally from his capital. To accept such a demand, as Lytton's Foreign Secretary was not slow to detect, was to break finally and openly with the Russians. 'If we begin by saying to him,' warned Lyall, 'that "we have no discussion whatever upon any question of alliance with you until you have immediately quarrelled with the Russians" the Amir will much (sic) protest against being off with the old love before he is sure of being on with the new one.'<sup>37</sup> It was urged upon the Viceroy that the envoy should have discretion to ascertain whether the Amir's disposition was generally friendly or unfriendly, and that if it was friendly, to expand the essential conditions of an alliance and assure the Amir beforehand that the British government was fully prepared to protect him and his whole territory from the consequences of dismissing the Russian agency. 'Otherwise I hold that the single demand for the dismissal of Russian agency,' Lyall emphasised, 'is equivalent to a declaration of war with Afghanistan and the test, thus applied, is too severe.'<sup>38</sup> Lytton would hear nothing of such arguments.<sup>39</sup> In fact, it seems that Lytton would have welcomed a public rupture with the Amir. An affront on such a large scale and the consequent excitement of public opinion were bound to force the Cabinet to authorise retaliatory action. Burne had set himself the task of inspiring the British Press.<sup>40</sup> In James Fitzjames Stephen<sup>41</sup>, Lytton had a semi-official exponent of his policy.<sup>42</sup> Cranbrook, now in the India

receive it, it was felt, 'he would have ample time to provide for its safe conduct and proper reception.'<sup>49</sup> The Commissioner of Peshawar was instructed to inform the Amir on 7 September that a mission was to leave about the 16th whether the agent had reached Kabul or not. It was maintained that the object of the mission was friendly, but the refusal of its passage and safe conduct to Kabul would be regarded as an act of open hostility.<sup>50</sup> In short, Lytton challenged the Amir on the question of whether a friendly mission was bound to wait until he chose to give it permission to cross the border or whether having regard to the urgency of the business and the presence of the Russians at Kabul, Lytton was justified in insisting that Sher Ali must admit the mission immediately or accept the consequence.<sup>51</sup> Sher Ali's refusal to grant this permission Lytton would interpret as open hostility.<sup>52</sup>

There were considerable misgivings in London with regard to Lytton's belligerent attitude. Whatever might have been its initial objectives in sending Lytton to India, subsequent complications in Europe had considerably toned down the initiative of the Cabinet. On the basis of Lytton's despatches it had concluded that the Amir would certainly not co-operate in any aggressive action against Russia and without his active assistance Lytton's Central Asian operations were inadmissible.<sup>53</sup> In view of such considerations and in the absence of any trustworthy means of obtaining information about the activities of the Russian agents at Kabul, or of Russian designs generally, it was felt undesirable to move immediately.<sup>54</sup> The India Office was awaiting the outcome of Napier's probing mission to Merv.<sup>55</sup> Besides, the annexation of territory in that region would have destroyed 'our profession of disinterestedness in Eastern Europe'. Financially, it would have told heavily on Indian resources and given 'a fearful weapon in her [Russia's] hands for use when she desired to intrigue against us with the native powers.'<sup>56</sup>

<sup>49.</sup> Lytton to Cranbrook, 31 August 1878, LyP. (3); also see 'memo by the Viceroy for circulation among the Council members', 5 September 1878, StrP.

<sup>50.</sup> Lytton to Cranbrook, 31 August 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

<sup>51.</sup> Lytton to R. Strachey, 5 August 1878, StrP.

<sup>52.</sup> Lytton to Cranbrook, 31 August 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

<sup>53.</sup> Cranbrook to Lytton, 1 May 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

<sup>54.</sup> *I.b.I.*

<sup>55.</sup> *I.b.I.*

<sup>56.</sup> *I.b.I.*

By mid-July the political temper in Europe was becoming hopeful. British public opinion seemed extraordinarily united behind the Congress line of Salisbury. Even the sympathetic Indian secretary could hardly have thought that such a time would be chosen by the Russians to 'irritate us'.<sup>57</sup> From his conversation with Burne, Cranbrook concluded that Sher Ali was somewhat shaken by Lytton's hostility and was likely to have recourse to British friendship. 'There appeared to be so many causes working adversely on the Ameer,' wrote Cranbrook, 'that one feels rather inclined to wait a short time longer before taking any irrevocable step.'<sup>58</sup> Sher Ali's difficulties, as viewed from London, appeared to be how 'to become friends with us and meet our wishes and at the same time keep up his own dignity'.<sup>59</sup> If any plan could be devised without harming his dignity, thus meeting Sher Ali half way in the matter, Cranbrook believed that the time had come when 'we could with every hope of success reopen negotiations with him'.<sup>60</sup> In line with his conciliatory attitude, Cranbrook was indifferent to the Russian proceedings towards the Akhal country and would have viewed the prospect of Muscovite rule over Merv as problems that 'lay in the future—too far off to be speculated upon'.<sup>61</sup> As a remedy for the growing Russian ascendancy, Cranbrook was to prescribe the moral influence of Britain on 'Asiatic opinion, which would have warded off many dangers that might threaten a supposed weakness'.<sup>62</sup> It was in the midst of such a climate of opinion that the news of the Russian mission in Kabul reached London. The reactions of the authorities, anxious as they were to preserve the Berlin spirit, were extremely pragmatic. It is small wonder that they took no account of the views of the Government of India.

Here lay the crux of the problem. In fact the difference of opinion between the Home government and the Indian government was laid bare over the question of the demands that Chamberlain was authorised to make to the Amir. Salisbury, in particular, had considerable doubts as to the expediency of the mission itself. He was

57. Cranbrook to Temple, 17 July 1878, TemP. F86/17.

58. Cranbrook to Lytton, 1 May 1878, LyP. 516 (5).

59. Cranbrook to Temple, 31 July 1878, TemP. F86/17; also, Temple to Lytton, 6 August 1878, TemP. F86/17.

60. Cranbrook to Lytton, 24 May 1878, LyP. 519 (8).

61. Cranbrook to Temple, 25 June 1878, TemP. F16/17,

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uneasy.<sup>63</sup> Cairns, Cross and Northcote grumbled.<sup>64</sup> But the die had been cast in India. It had been proclaimed with too many trumpets to be abandoned. But the function of the mission could still be reconsidered so as to render it as innocuous as possible. Salisbury set himself earnestly to that task. Of the four principal things that Lytton wished the Mission to do, only one had the approval of the Cabinet. This concerned the demand for the acceptance of a British mission at Kabul and consulates at the frontiers. This was, Salisbury recommended, 'both wise and a necessary measure', but he emphasised the need of going 'no further at present'.<sup>65</sup> The two other demands, namely, the retirement of the Russian Embassy and the promise never to receive another, together with the offer of a guarantee against Russia appeared to him 'quite wrong'.<sup>66</sup> The first demand, according to Salisbury, was obviously absurd. It was, in short, a request that the Amir 'shall insult Russia'. In fact, Salisbury simply echoed Lyall when he wrote: 'It amounts to a demand that he should go to war with Russia, and could only be enforced by a threat that if he refuses Lytton would go to war with him'.<sup>67</sup> The second demand was more reasonable, but the Cabinet saw no advantage in it. 'You may very fairly object to the establishment of a permanent Russian mission at Cabul,' Salisbury argued, 'but the demand that he shall never receive a complimentary message from his neighbour is useless, undignified and hard to enforce.'<sup>68</sup> The proposal to guarantee his territory appeared to be equally unwise, because it would have led to an ambiguous position and exposed the British to a constant charge of bad faith. The frontier of Afghanistan was ill-defined and it was apprehended that the British might be called upon to fight for a disputed title over 'a piece of Central Asian sand', which was claimed by one of Russia's numerous allies, or might any day be attacked by a 'savage Turkoman Khan' under Russian inspiration.<sup>69</sup> Besides, it was a pertinent question whether the guarantee against Russia was claimable if Sher

63. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 17 September 1878, CranP. 269.

64. Cranbrook to Lytton, 22 September 1878, LyP. 516 (3). Monypenny and Buckle, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-88.

65. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 17 September 1878, CranP. 269.

66. *Ibid.*

67. *Ibid.*

68. *Ibid.*

69. *Ibid.*

Ali lost his throne by conduct which the British might think unwise. In view of these considerations, it was decided to confine the instruction to the mission to the simple demand of a foothold in the country by the admission of a mission and consuls or residents. 'All the rest,' Salisbury was to argue, 'would follow more gradually and naturally'.<sup>70</sup> It would, for example, be relatively easier to set up both a party as well as an influence, once an agency was admitted. And as soon as a turn in the fortunes of the dynasty took place either in the form of a rebellion or a disputed succession, 'we shall be able by making use of the favourable moment to extract what treaty stipulation we please and then we shall dominate as completely as we do in Khelat or Zanzibar'.<sup>71</sup> But that favourable moment was yet to come. The Home government was particularly concerned about the excited state of affairs in the Muslim world. Sher Ali, it was apprehended, if attacked or menaced, would have very little difficulty in rousing the tribes against the British. It was thus not considered judicious to create 'a new Bosnia in the Far East'.<sup>72</sup>

Cranbrook was not happy with the decision to make a fresh remonstrance to Russia. It would not, he claimed, favourably alter their policy towards Afghanistan. True, the Russian answer was far from consistent. After having stated that the disposition of the Imperial government in Central Asia had been antagonised by the attitude of Great Britain in the Near East, they added that the mission was one of a purely courteous and provisional character and therefore had in no way clashed with the assurances given by Russia formerly.<sup>73</sup> Yet, despite misgivings, Cranbrook consented to the modifications as suggested by the Cabinet.<sup>74</sup> The object of the Home government, he wrote to Lytton, was to enable the Amir to see that he had a common interest 'with ourselves, and give us the opportunity of knowing thoroughly by our own British agents what is passing on his frontiers'.<sup>75</sup> It was to be stipulated that no permanent or

70. *Ibid.*

71. *Ibid.*

72. *Ibid.*; Cranbrook to Lytton, 22 September 1878, LyP. 516/3.

73. 'I am convinced that the Russian remonstrance will not make much change—but the actions of the foreign office have taken from your hands the demands from the Ameer of the withdrawal or dismissal of the Russian mission.' Cranbrook to Lytton, 22 September 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

74. *Ibid.*

75. Cranbrook to Lytton, 20 August 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

temporary Russian mission should be received by him without the assent of the British. But in respect of the existing Russian mission, it was insisted that its dismissal should not be forced on the Amir, 'for that had been adopted as a F.O. question'.<sup>76</sup> As regards a sufficient *quid pro quo* Lytton was authorised to allow the Afghan ruler subsidies, recognition of a dynastic arrangement and a general alliance. It was also laid down that if demands were made for any specific guarantee, reference home should be made before any promise was given. Lytton's object in Afghanistan, Cranbrook impressed upon the Viceroy, ought to be to secure whoever might be its ruler on the basis of common interests. Lytton was to make it clear to Sher Ali that 'we are far from wishing to annex and that our agencies would be for the advantage of the Afghans as well as ourselves.'<sup>77</sup> Cranbrook was alive to the dangers of existing responsibilities in Afghanistan. Thus Lytton was forbidden to undertake any commitment which would not or could not be fulfilled. 'Say nothing,' he emphasised, 'that any government in India will not feel bound to do, and say it as not to bind the future.'<sup>78</sup> The newsletter from Kabul only tended to show that the Amir's animosity was lessening and that he was anxious to see a British envoy, especially if he would come to say 'we are both in the wrong'. In fact, Cranbrook was keen to point out that far from being a good opportunity to take, the Russian mission had created an 'embarrassing position for us'.<sup>79</sup>

Further directives were soon to arrive. No one knew in the India Office that Salisbury had remonstrated with St. Petersburg although it was done in consequence of a despatch from the India Office. Cranbrook, in particular, was left under the impression that the Foreign Office had thought it prudent to abstain from remonstrance. On the eve of the departure of the mission, however, Cranbrook, in consequence of a telegram from the Foreign Office, directed Lytton to delay the mission so as to know the answer to Loftus' remonstrance to St. Petersburg.<sup>80</sup> It was believed that if the mission was withdrawn the question of a British agent in Afghanistan might then be taken up between Sher Ali

76. Cranbrook to Lytton, 22 September 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

77. Cranbrook to Lytton, 30 August 1878, LyP. 576 (3).

78. *Ibid.*

79. Cranbrook to Lytton, 23 September 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

80. Cranbrook to Lytton, 15 September 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

and Lytton as a local question not concerning Russia.<sup>81</sup> Besides, the Foreign Office was apprehensive of the complications resulting from the refusal to accept the British mission by the Amir. In such a contingency a reference to St. Petersburg was bound to cause considerable diplomatic embarrassment. It was doubtful whether the British Foreign Office could with propriety make a demand to Russia 'for the fulfilment of which we have no prior engagement'.<sup>82</sup>

Significantly enough, Lytton proceeded with his project notwithstanding the explicit order of the Home government to the contrary. On 12 September, Chamberlain arrived at Peshawar with his large entourage, armed with Lytton's original instructions.<sup>83</sup> From Peshawar, he despatched a native mission to notify the Amir of his imminent arrival.<sup>84</sup> Little time was allowed to the Amir to decline it,<sup>85</sup> and on 21 September Chamberlain sent Cavagnari and his men to the advanced Afghan post at Ali Masjid only to be barred by the Amir's officers.<sup>86</sup>

After a quick exchange of very civil greetings Cavagnari returned. On the following morning the world came to know that the honourable mission of the Empress of India had summarily been rebuffed by a 'conceited maniac', the Amir of Afghanistan, a country which produced nothing but 'stones and scoundrels'.<sup>87</sup> The Press was adequately managed by Lytton and the great publicity given to the mission was meant to dramatise the situation. In support of his publicity campaign, Lytton wrote: 'Publication of the political news

81. *Ibid.*

82. Note by Cranbrook, 5 October 1878, CranP. 36 (N. 1).

83. Chamberlain to Lytton, 18 October 1878, P.P. Vol. 56, p. 241.

84. Nawab Gulam Hasan Khan, a former Vakil at Kabul had left for Kabul on 30 August. His departure from Peshawar was delayed by the unexpected death of the heir apparent on 17 September.

85. On 13 September, in a telegram Cranbrook asked Lytton, at the desire of the Prime Minister and Salisbury, to await orders before despatching the mission. Cranbrook to Lytton, 13 September 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

86. Sher Ali was greatly distressed by the move. It is not proper, he protested, 'to use pressure in this way; it will tend to a complete rupture and breach of friendship.' Chamberlain to Lytton, 18 October 1878, P.P. Vol. 56, p. 241.

87. 'Memo of the Viceroy for circulation among the members of the Council,' 5 September 1878, StrP.

cannot, I fear, be postponed. Almost every Indian newspaper has now a correspondent in Peshawar and four of them have correspondence with the English Press...In these circumstances it becomes of pressing importance to forestall misrepresentation of facts which cannot be concealed, put the press early on the right groove and secure its support. I have therefore already telegraphed the main facts to the Times Correspondent at Calcutta adding that the Viceroy's further action must largely depend on the degree of support received from the Home government.<sup>88</sup>

Lytton was to maintain subsequently that his conduct was not a violation of official directives. Cagnari's company, he was to emphasise, formed a reconnaissance party and not the mission proper. Lytton was also to claim that Jamrud was not an Afghan territory, although Afghan troops were 'illegally occupying that post'. Besides Lytton argued that direct action upon Afghanistan having been accepted as the primary move, any subsequent dialogue with St. Petersburg could not have affected the character of the mission. But the most impressive argument was that in view of the terms of the understanding with the Khyberis it was becoming increasingly impossible not to take precautions for the independence of the Khyber zone.<sup>89</sup>

Few at home could have taken Lytton's arguments in good faith. It was evident that Lytton was forcing the hand of the Home

88. Lytton to Strachey, 27 September 1878, StrP.

89. Lytton to Cranbrook, 11 October, 1878, LyP. 518 (3); also, Lytton to Cranbrook, 28 November, 1878, LyP. 518 (2). 'I can truly say that this [forcing the hands of the home government] was not my intention. The fact is it never occurred to me that, after authorising me to insist on the reception of the mission, Her Majesty's Government could possibly intend to make its movement depend on the Russian Government, and I honestly interpreted the telegram (which I did not think I was disregarding) as an intimation that the communication expected from St. Petersburg might be of a character to modify the language held by our mission at Kabul, or on the condition on which it was instructed to insist. My telegram would be ample time to alter Sir Neville's instructions long before he could reach Kabul. And my reason for then advancing the mission, was, as I think I explained in a former letter, that if I did not advance then, *it* was very doubtful whether it could advance at all'. Lytton to Cranbrook, 21 November 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

government.<sup>90</sup> The considerations upon which he had felt the necessity of immediate action with regard to the mission could, it was argued, have been submitted during the interval between the telegram of 13 September and the date of the departure of Cavagnari.<sup>91</sup> The Cabinet felt that the answer of the Russian government might have 'modified' the course of the policy towards Afghanistan.<sup>92</sup> Personally, Cranbrook did not think so. But the majority did. Salisbury and Disraeli were most vehement in their condemnation. They argued that the telegram of the *Times* correspondent interfered with their diplomatic pressure upon Russia and tended 'to justify its ministers in speaking with greater reserve than they otherwise might have done'.<sup>93</sup> If Lytton had ventured on these steps, Beaconsfield wrote, 'with full acquaintance of our relations with Russia on the subject of Afghanistan he has committed a grave error. If he has been left in ignorance of them, our responsibility is extreme'.<sup>94</sup> In fact, Beaconsfield was to judge the explanations of the Russian government as satisfactory. He was inclined to accept the argument of the Russian foreign office that the mission had been intended in view of the threatened war with Britain. Such a war being then 'out of the question', Beaconsfield was confident that the whole matter would have quietly disappeared.<sup>95</sup>

The decision of the British government was guided by a number of considerations. Everyone in a responsible position agreed that Afghanistan must pay all the expenses necessary for its annexation and its administration. Lytton was aware of the grim reality and apart from a few casual references he never ventured to raise the issue of the conquest of Afghanistan. In fact he was positively against annexation.<sup>96</sup> On the contrary he was in favour of a material guarantee in order to ensure the co-operation of the Afghan ruler in

90. 'He had twice disobeyed orders', Salisbury spoke in great disgust, 'first in acting on the Khaiber pass, secondly in sending the mission contrary to the most express and repeated orders that he was not to do so, till we had received an expected despatch from Russia, and never without the precise instructions of the Ministry of England'. Monypenny and Buckle, *op. cit.*, pp. 386-88.

91. Cranbrook to Lytton, 6 October 1878, LyP. 516 (3); also see Cranbrook to Lytton, 23 September, 1878, LyP. (3).

92. *Ibid.*

93. Note by Cranbrook, 5 October 1878, CranP. 36 (N. 1).

94. Disraeli to Cranbrook, 12 September 1878, CranP. 256.

95. *Ibid.*

96. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

the event of a military venture against the Russian Empire. It was over the definition and scope of the material guarantee that the Home and the Indian governments disagreed. Salisbury, who carried the real weight in the Cabinet,<sup>97</sup> viewed the problem objectively. He had supported Lytton in his attempt to win over the Amir by concessions at Peshawar. Once, however, the Amir proved adamant in his opposition, Salisbury saw the necessity of outflanking the Amir and of making alternative arrangements for the security of India. This entailed the gradual building up of the material strength of British India near Kandahar and Herat; hence the approval of the Khelat and the Quetta policy of the Government of India; hence also the instruction of the India secretary to move towards Kandahar if war was absolutely necessary.<sup>98</sup> There were certain objective realities in favour of such a thrust. The co-operation of the Durranis was within the range of reasonable possibility, while a concentration of military strength at Khelat would have turned southern and western Afghanistan more towards the British.

Any attempt to conquer Afghanistan would have been more than an economic liability. Such a move would have entailed considerable diplomatic, political and military embarrassments. This was all the more so in view of the existing obligations entered into by the Foreign Office vis-a-vis Russia. Russia's great Central Asian impulse was still a potent force.<sup>99</sup> The Russians had been extending their influence over the Kirghiz of the Alai and the Pamirs. They had been surveying at Sirikul on the Pamirs, only 9 or 10 marches from Gilgit. They were within earshot of the principalities of the Upper Oxus which had lately been annexed by Afghanistan. 'It is among these Shia principalities (Wakhan, Badakshan, Roshan, Shignan, Chitral etc.)', wrote an expert at the War Office, 'that we may expect to find the Russians working for evil against Sunni Afghanistan'. It was expected that in their project the Russians would be assisted by Bukhara, which claimed a tract of country south of the Oxus—Maimena and Andkoi—and which exercised under Russian inspiration

97. Disraeli to Cranbrook, 22 September 1878, CranP.

98. 'I suppose', Cranbrook wrote, 'should the Ameer decline to receive a mission you would approach by Candahar'. Cranbrook to Lytton, 23 July 1878, LyP. 516 (3).

99. For a very interesting study of Russian activities in Central Asia, see F.C. Clarke, 'Memorandum on the Russian military preparations in Central Asia', 10 August 1878, F.O. 539, 3871, pp. 106-109.

a nominal sovereignty in Karategin, Darwaz, Kulab and Hissar. It was hardly necessary to point out the disquieting effect which a Russian Cossack colony established at the foot of the Hindukush would have exercised on the Afghan people and on the border tribes of India.<sup>100</sup> The diplomatic negotiations of 1869 to 1873 had eased the situation for a time. There was a clear-cut demarcation of the frontier of a probable British zone of influence up to the Oxus. The Russians had undertaken not to extend their military frontier south of that river. It was, however, not yet decided whether the Russians could ever establish normal diplomatic relations with Afghanistan and it was not for the British Foreign Office to dictate such terms to Russia. It had been felt that the exclusion of Russian influence from Afghanistan ought to be brought about by the Amir acting as an agent of the British government. This Northbrook had failed to do. Lytton, prior to the conference at Peshawar, was endeavouring to achieve it. But the Amir had reason to be suspicious. As he showed his reluctance to lose his sovereignty, Lytton got impatient. But in his haste he did not appreciate the inability of the Home government to support his scheme. To the dismay of the Viceroy, it even entered into further discussion with its counterpart in Russia involving obligations detrimental to action. The mission of General Stolietoff to Kabul gave rise to a new course of negotiation over the status of Afghanistan. The immediate explanation of the Russian government about the nature of the mission was soon offset by the knowledge that although Stolietoff, the head of the mission, had left Kabul in August 1878, the mission itself remained there.<sup>101</sup> This fact was first brought formally to the notice of the British government by Count Schouvaloff in a conversation on December 1878.<sup>102</sup> The notification of the Russian government was

100. 'Without possessing and colonising it [Badakshan], we [the Russians] can never guarantee the peace of Turkistan, or even the solidity of our rule there ...Without Badakshan, the Russians must consider themselves as guests, without any settled population and unable to form one'. Col. Veniukoff, 'The Progress of Russia in Central Asia', translated in the War Office, 1878, Memo. C. 17, p. 19.

101. See for a good account of the Anglo-Russian discussions over Central Asia, Burne, 'Russia in Central Asia,' Part I, 1879 Memo, C. 23.

102. Salisbury to Loftus, 13 December 1878, No. 173, F.O. 539/12, p. 401; 401-2. Salisbury to Schouvaloff, 17 December 1878, No. 274, F.O. 539/12, pp.

to the effect that Sher Ali had applied to it for help and protection and that the Imperial government was disposed to advise the Amir to put an end to the conflict which had arisen, but would only do this upon receiving an assurance that Britain would respect the independence of Afghanistan. Upon further clarification it was held that the independent state of Afghanistan would be subject to British influence and that the Russians were inclined to overlook any contradiction between the words 'recognition and independence of Afghanistan' and 'such rectification as might be necessary to procure a scientific frontier'.<sup>103</sup> The British government was unwilling to accept the construction placed upon Derby's Memorandum to the effect that the British were under no obligation to respect any engagement with regard to the independence of Afghanistan. It was obvious, however, that Salisbury felt helpless in the face of the written memorandum of the preceding foreign minister.<sup>104</sup> He therefore hastened to assure the Russian minister that large annexations were not contemplated in the war. Such obligations as these found their expression in the hesitation on the part of the Home government to sanction the plan of Lytton's operation and particularly the extension of British power which Lytton had always had in mind. Besides, the complications in Turkey had confused the situation still further. The Russians were showing considerable reluctance to implement the settlement of Berlin. It was therefore decided to give them positive assurances to the effect that the Indian army would not move towards Herat.

The humiliation the Afghans had caused Cavagnari to suffer had to be avenged. This was the verdict of British public opinion. Lytton was jubilant at his success. The Liberals had started a strong attack on his Afghan policy.<sup>105</sup> But Lytton was ~~an~~<sup>an</sup>

that things had moved considerably and the Cabinet had by then lost the initiative of the main game.<sup>106</sup> 'I think Lord Lawrence has banged his kettle drum,' he was soon to write, 'an hour too late. His drumming has no doubt awakened the spartan life of Lord Grey; but I hope the country is not now in a humour to dance to the tune of national humiliation'.<sup>107</sup> As was anticipated, the Viceroy sought permission to declare war immediately. At home, the government was reluctant to meet his demands. It was believed that Lytton could obtain all the objectives by patient and firm diplomacy towards both Russia and Afghanistan.<sup>108</sup> It was maintained that when the Russia mission withdrew together with all the active and dangerous influences, Lytton should work with the Amir through the native envoy.<sup>109</sup> Yet the insult of the Afghan prince could not be swallowed and the rest of the period until the beginning of the war the Cabinet tried to limit the scope of Lytton's punitive measures.

It will be instructive to assess how the problem was viewed in London. The following questions were raised by the Cabinet in thrashing out their policy. First, could the Russians be held responsible for the affront? No one was willing to accept such a suggestion. Secondly, was the Amir a party to it or had it happened in the absence of direction from Kabul? In that case, it was thought that matters could be set right, as one could not expect the Amir to adopt as his own something he had not directed, especially when it might involve consequences so serious.<sup>110</sup> Thus it was agreed that if Lytton thought that the affront had the approval of the Amir he might adopt measures to fulfil the pledges given to

106. 'When action of some kind was, at last, forced upon us by the reception of the Russian mission,' Lytton wrote to Cranbrook, 'had I entrusted the conduct of the Mission to anyone in India except Sir Neville Chamberlain, the failure of the mission would have been universally ascribed to our own rash departure from the principle of the established Punjab policy or to the ineptitude of my selected agent. This, I trust, is now impossible. The affront offered to the British Government in the person of Sir N. Chamberlain, is certainly not greater than any of the numerous affronts tacitly accepted from the Ameer by the British Government, during the last seven years'. 23 September 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

107. *Ibid.*

108. Northcote to Cranbrook, 30 September 1878, CranP. 271.

109. Napier to Stephen, 17 November 1878, SteP. Box III.

110. Cranbrook to Lytton, 23 September, 1878, LyP. 516 (3)

letter. If the Amir accepted the terms of the letter it was difficult to see how he could move at all. 'How could we commit a hostile act against a prince who had just offered us the apology and reparations dictated by ourselves as sufficient?' Lytton wrote. 'We must then either break our implied pledge to the Ameer, or forfeit our given pledge to the Khyberis.'<sup>118</sup> Hence, to make things difficult for the Amir, he insisted that an apology, either verbal or written, was not enough. To accept an apology, he urged, 'would be to run the risk of losing India'.<sup>119</sup> The Amir was asked to evacuate the Khyber pass which 'is not Afghan territory, which does not belong and never belonged to him', and to send one of his family to Peshawar to present to Neville Chamberlain his apology.<sup>120</sup> It was, in fact, a tricky gamble on the part of the Viceroy. But Lytton was convinced that 'a horse, a woman and a native prince, once turned thoroughly vicious, are irredeemable'.<sup>121</sup> He was correct in his political speculation. The Amir's reply arrived on 30 November. The ultimatum had expired on 20 November and war had already been ten days old. The Viceroy was all the more vindicated as the reply of the Amir contained none of the conditions of the ultimatum—an unreserved apology, acceptance of a permanent British Mission and the recognition of the independence of the Khyberis. Lytton would take no notice of it. Nor would he allow it to stand in the way of the advance of his soldiers.<sup>122</sup>

The Cabinet stepped in again. The death of Abdullah Jan had engendered fresh hopes in favour of negotiations. While the 'doves' in the Cabinet sought a political solution with Sher Ali, Cranbrook resolutely supported and upheld the Viceroy. Of course, the Viceroy's irresponsible discretion had time and again rendered his task difficult. Cranbrook had, however, entered heart and soul into the arguments of Lytton and after a heated controversy in the Cabinet, secured its support for Lytton's proposed policy.<sup>123</sup> The

118. Lytton to Cranbrook, 11 October 1878, LyP. 518/2; also Lytton to Cranbrook, 28 November 1878, LyP (3); Lytton to Strachey, 24 October 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

119. Lytton to Cranbrook, 11 October 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

120. *Ibid.*

121. *Ibid.*

122. Lytton to Cranbrook, 28 November 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

123. Notes by Cranbrook, 25 October 1878, CranP. 36 (N. 1).

Viceroy had already warned that if the troops were not allowed to cross the frontier on 21 November he would 'deem it his duty to disband them immediately and explain to the people of India, the circumstances which had left to the Government of India no alternative.'<sup>124</sup> Permission was now accorded, with reservations. It was agreed that a further letter should be addressed to the Amir. Moreover, Lytton was instructed to abstain from all efforts to upset the Amir.<sup>125</sup> It was the object of the Home government to deal with the Amir leniently if he could be induced to submit to moderate terms, and Lytton was to give the Amir this assurance if he found a favourable opportunity to do so without loss of dignity.<sup>126</sup> Obviously, these considerations were motivated by European complications and Derby's assurances to his Russian counterpart to maintain the independence and integrity of Afghanistan. 'The Foreign Office clearly wants time,' Cranbrook wrote, 'and indeed Turkish complications affect our Indian policy prejudicially.'<sup>127</sup>

The directives of the Home government seriously limited Lytton's initiative. But the Viceroy would not lose heart. He was happy to note that Beaconsfield appreciated the importance of the rectification of the frontier. This meant to Lytton the establishment of political arrangements sufficient to guarantee the complete exclusion of Russian influence from Afghanistan.<sup>128</sup> In fact, in his proclamation,<sup>129</sup> Lytton insisted that the British government would not tolerate interference on the part of any other power in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. The Home government, having sanctioned these words, was committed to the very principle for which Lytton had been contending. True, the word 'internal' implied a limitation which Lytton regretted most. Instead, he would have preferred 'the affairs of Afghanistan both internal and external'. Still, the words, as they stood, had the right ring about them and it was believed that they would do well.<sup>130</sup>

It is not necessary to relate the events of the second Afghan war. A brief sketch of the main events may, however, be given for the sake

124. Lytton to Cranbrook, 13 November 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

125. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

126. *Ibid.*

127. Notes by Cranbrook, 25 October 1878, CranP. 38 (N. 1).

128. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518 (3).

129. See the text of the Proclamation in F.O. 539/12, p. 345.

130. Temple to Lytton, 28 November 1878, LyP. 519 (9).

of clarity. On the morning of November 21 1878, war was declared. General Brown crossed the Afghan frontier and moved up the Khyber on Ali Masjid. General Roberts was given command of the Kurram Valley and General Biddulph of the Quetta force. Within two weeks the Kurram and the Khyber passes fell into British hands and by the end of January 1879, the southern half of Afghanistan passed to the British. On February 1879, Sher Ali died near Balkh, in northern Afghanistan, having failed to secure Russian assistance. Negotiations started with Yakub, now the nominal head of Afghanistan. These negotiations dragged on and a constant show of strength by the invading army forced Yakub to come to terms. The treaty of Gandamak was the outcome, and it was formally ratified by the Viceroy on 30 May 1879. In accordance with the treaty of Gandamak, Cavagnari reached Kabul on 24 July 1879, as British Envoy Extra-ordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary. For a time the situation remained calm. On the morning of 3 September the British regency was attacked by rebel soldiers and by midday all the members of the residence except one Kajir Khan had been killed and the building set on fire. A move by the British army was indispensable and on 12 October General Roberts entered Kabul. Yakub was forced to abdicate. The city of Kabul, as Lytton saw it, stood as 'the great national culprit now awaiting its sentence'. 'Do not forget', Lytton ordered Roberts, 'that there will be more clamour at home over the fall of a single head six months hence than over a hundred heads that fall at once'. But it was the restoration of order and the organisation of civil government that proved the greatest difficulty. For about six months Roberts struggled hard to achieve his objective. In the meantime the Conservatives fell from power, Lytton resigned, Abdul Rahman emerged triumphantly from exile in Tashkent and negotiations were started with him. Southern Afghanistan had been cut off from the rest of Afghanistan under one Sher Ali, a British puppet. Finally a treaty was concluded with Abdul Rahman. Behind all these moves by Lytton lay one strong desire : to organise a few states with what he thought to be a clear-cut ethnic and 'national' preponderance over the territory of project.<sup>131</sup> By January 1880, it was evident that he had failed in the

131. For details of the second Afghan war see the following : D.P. Singhal *India and Afghanistan (1876-1907)*, Queensland, 1963, pp. 49-75. D.K. Ghose, *England and Afghanistan*, Calcutta 1960, pp. 57-102.

## The War and the Withdrawal

In the preceding chapters an attempt has been made to analyse the trend of the Afghan problem and how Lytton sharpened the contradictions in the relations between British India and Afghanistan by sheer manipulation and a series of unauthorised initiatives which had the effect of forcing the hand of the Cabinet. And yet, by 1880, things seemed no more satisfactory than in 1876. In Abdul Rahman Afghanistan was to find another Barakzai sovereign, while Kandahar was soon to be united with Kabul.

The Home government was becoming increasingly uneasy about the Viceroy's over-zealous frontier policy. The Foreign Office, in particular, was extremely complacent about the Russian mission. Salisbury, while in the India Office, had been indifferent to the significance of Kauffman's correspondence with the Amir<sup>1</sup>; and advised Lytton to emancipate himself from the unstable influence of the militarists about him<sup>2</sup>. Lytton's anxieties had been described as 'nightmares' and his calculations as 'the crude excursions of untutored fancy'<sup>3</sup>. On the arrival of the Russians at Kabul, Salisbury, then in the Foreign Office and exerting a commanding influence in the cabinet<sup>4</sup>, had advised caution with characteristic detachment<sup>5</sup>. 'I think,' he wrote, 'there is no harm in the Ameer's seeing a Russian

1. 'The tone and the insinuations are objectionable: but there is no distinctly objectionable statement', wrote Salisbury on the letters of Kauffman. 'What the Viceroy wants, I take it, is a written disclaimer from any intentions to negotiate Treaties with Sher Ali without our consent. Can you get this?' Salisbury to Derby, 3 July 1876, Private/Cabinet, DcrP.
2. Salisbury to Derby, 16 September 1876, Private/Cabinet, DerP.
3. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 3 July 1878, CranP. 51.
4. Note by Cranbrook, 25 October 1878, CranP. 36 (N. 1).
5. Maitland to Barrington, 31 July 1878, SalP. Drafts, 1878-80.

mission at Kabul : but he must in that case see British officers equally.<sup>6</sup> It was with much reluctance that he agreed to remonstrate with the Russian Foreign Ministry. 'I doubt the practical value of firing these despatches at me,' he wrote, on receiving a 'blood and thunder' memorandum from the India Office urging immediate action, 'except of course as a matter of relief, to the feeling of the Political committee.'<sup>7</sup> He was perfectly sure that Russia would be willing to send assurances but that she would never follow them up with necessary action. 'You would not venture to ask Parliament for two extra regiments,' he wrote, 'on account of a movement in some unknown sandhills which is supposed to be a menace to Merv. That being known to be the case, no despatches from this office, even if they were written by Burne (himself unrestrained), would in the least degree disturb P. Gortchakoff or provoke a single telegraphic order to Turkistan.'<sup>8</sup> It was only to soothe the feelings of the India Office that Salisbury had agreed to be 'exhorted'<sup>9</sup>. His unqualified opposition to Lytton's instructions to Chamberlain had been more resolute<sup>10</sup>. On the eve of the war Salisbury took great care to ensure that the object of the war was not to be an attempt to take Kabul. Such a move, Salisbury warned, would bring the British army into a nest of hornets.<sup>11</sup> If, on the contrary, he urged, Kandahar was occupied, 'we can keep it and shall not be forced to meddle with the fanatical tribes who inhabit the Cabul-Khyber country.'<sup>12</sup> As Lytton moved ahead with his plan, Salisbury hastened to offer a last-minute solution. Would it not be most convenient, he argued, simply to seize the provinces which were financially and strategically the most desirable?<sup>13</sup> He recalled the precedent of the occupation of Pegu during the days of Dalhousie. 'The result has been,' he wrote optimistically, 'that we are as much the masters of the king of Burmah as if we were at Ave : while he, not we, has the responsibility of the wild tribes of the neighbouring mountains.'<sup>14</sup> He was

6. *Ibid.*

7. Burne to Lytton, 8 August 1878, SalP.

8. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 9 August 1878, SalP.

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Ibid.*

11. Cranbrook to Salisbury, 14 September 1878, SalP.

12. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 26 September 1878, SalP.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 29 September 1878, SalP.

15. *Ibid.*,

confident that Lytton, if his soldiers would let him alone, was disposed to a policy of that kind.<sup>16</sup>

Cranbrook, however, stood by Lytton. Early in July 1878 Cranbrook had concluded that Afghanistan ought not to be allowed to grant to Russia what she had refused to the British. His only concern had been that the *modus operandi* 'must be carefully weighed'.<sup>17</sup> By September 1878 Cranbrook agreed with Lytton that if Russia decided to move upon Merv he would like Britain to take action.<sup>18</sup> 'It must be by self-assertion that we must make our policy clear,' he wrote, 'and however reluctantly support it at any cost.'<sup>19</sup> Lytton was informed that his failure to upset the Amir would necessitate a full-scale war.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the Indian secretary was convinced that a collision with the Amir's army could not be avoided unless the Amir retracted and apologised, which, as he put it, was 'most unlikely'.<sup>21</sup> The Cabinet, however, was sharply divided on the whole issue.<sup>22</sup> It appeared to some of them that the British did not have a clear right to send a mission to Kabul under the existing relations with Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup> Cranbrook was aware of such difficulties. But would it be realistic, he was to argue, to invoke International law in the context of Central Asia?<sup>24</sup> It was true that the documents as they appeared to the British implied that the Amir had rights on his side in some respects. But 'the facts when looked at,' Cranbrook wrote, 'point the other way'.<sup>25</sup> It was from this point of view that he had argued with Salisbury against the directive of the Foreign Office to postpone Chamberlain's mission to Kabul. He did not think that it would be wise to retract the mission which had been sanctioned by the Cabinet.<sup>26</sup> He agreed that Lytton's demand for the dismissal of the Russian Mission as a 'condition of our stay [was] quite unreasonable'.<sup>27</sup> But as regards the proposed general

16. *Ibid.*

17. Cranbrook to Lytton, 2 July 1878, LyP. 516/3.

18. Cranbrook to Lytton, 23 September 1878, LyP. 516/3.

19. Cranbrook to Lytton, 28 October 1878, LyP. 516/3.

20. *Ibid.*

21. *Ibid.*

22. 'Note' by Cranbrook, 25 October 1878, CranP. 36 (N. I.).

23. Cranbrook to Lytton, 28 October 1878, LyP. 516/3.

24. Note by Cranbrook, 25 October 1878, CranP. 36 (N. I.).

25. Cranbrook to Salisbury, 14 September 1878, SalP.

26. Cranbrook to Salisbury, 19 September 1878, SalP.

27. *Ibid.*

alliance with the Amir, Cranbrook backed Lytton to the hilt. Cranbrook felt that such an alliance with the Amir was impossible without special engagements. He was confident that if he was induced to admit residents, he would certainly be prepared to enter into some compact relating to common action in foreign affairs. He was aware that the reception of the Russian mission at Kabul had altered the state of affairs in Afghanistan. He feared that either the Russian government or her generals in Central Asia had determined to gain at least a diplomatic foothold in Kabul.<sup>28</sup> In order to neutralise Russian ascendancy in Afghanistan, Cranbrook thought it imperative to purchase the Amir's support 'unless we are prepared to extort it by force'.<sup>29</sup> He did not agree with Salisbury that the Amir ought not to be given either a permanent subsidy or the recognition of a successor or even military support. 'We must buy or we must compel,' wrote Cranbrook, 'and I am for the former.' Under these circumstances he felt that the British *quid pro quo* was not adequate.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Cranbrook was not seriously offended at the departure of Chamberlain's mission upon an unauthorised initiative by Lytton.<sup>31</sup> The Russian answer, he argued, could hardly have altered 'our conduct to the Ameer as the time had arrived when his choice of friends was being finally made'.<sup>32</sup> He was also sorry that Lytton was not left free to act upon Kurram.<sup>33</sup> 'If we cross the frontier at one point' he wrote, 'we are guilty of all and we need not create Rubicons elsewhere...'.<sup>34</sup> He had assured Lytton privately that an advance through Kurram 'seems to [me] both wise and most important'.<sup>35</sup>

28. *Ibid.*

29. *Ibid.*

30. 'I feel', Cranbrook wrote to Salisbury on the question of the alliance, 'that my months of Indian knowledge against your years ought to give way and I ask only the two concessions which you think adequate and to offer only the price which you believe can buy them. If not, then what? A reference home. Is it not dangerous to risk much? A loudly trumpeted Mission without powers to negotiate will not commend itself to so shrewd an observer as the Ameer. Sir Lewis Pelly had as much to offer and was rejected. This mission should buy what we want as cheaply as possible but should have a power to draw from a sum certain in its hands...The real question is at what price can be obtained what we consider essential'. *Ibid.*

31. Cranbrook to Salisbury, 7 October 1878, SalP.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Cranbrook to Lytton, 23 September, 1878, LyP. 516/3.

sanctioned, and once Sher Ali was dead, Lytton was instructed to open negotiations with Yakub Khan.<sup>44</sup> It was with much reluctance that the material guarantee was approved. In fact the clauses of the Gandamak treaty were a personal success for Cavagnari and a case illustrating the willingness of the Home government to approve a successful *fait accompli*. After the massacre of the British mission, Lytton was further directed to limit his operations to southern and north-eastern Afghanistan, and Herat was kept outside the scope of Lytton's revenge.<sup>45</sup> By the turn of the year 1879 there was much pressure on the Indian government in favour of a unilateral termination of the war,<sup>46</sup> an immediate withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan and the restoration of Yakub.<sup>47</sup>

In fact, by then Afghanistan had become a part of the European question. Derby's assurance to preserve the integrity of Afghanistan,<sup>48</sup> subsequently reaffirmed by Salisbury,<sup>49</sup> created a delicate diplomatic situation and a large scale operation in Afghanistan could not have gone unchallenged.<sup>50</sup> The rectification of frontiers, as

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permanent British mission at Kabul and a permanent agency at Herat with a recognised right of access to and intercourse with Balkh, Maimena and Kandahar. *Ibid.*

44. Cranbrook to Temple, 11 March 1879, TemP. 17. In fact even an advance upon Jelalabad was considered as beyond the original programme and exception was taken to Lytton's move. As to the question of guarantee against foreign invasion, there was much controversy before a very guarded article was approved in the Gundamak treaty. See Cranbrook to Lytton, 8 December 1878, LyP. 518/3; Cranbrook to Salisbury, 10 April 1879, SalP.; also Salisbury to Cranbrook, 13 April 1879, SalP.

45. This was conditioned by the negotiation with Persia over the future of Persia.

46. If possible by means of a proclamation, see Burne to Lytton, 3 January 1880, LyP. 516/6.

47. Lytton to Stephen, 15 January 1880, SteP. Box. I.

48. See Chapter IV.

49. See Chapter VI.

50. Apart from the undertaking to maintain the integrity of Afghanistan there were reasons to believe that Russia could object to rectification of frontiers with fairly successful results. 'We cannot', wrote Salisbury, 'of course admit that recent difficulties have given to Russia any right to interest herself in Afghanistan and Herat is part of Afghanistan, but as she is almost certain to claim no interest in Herat it is very desirable to avoid discussion till the thing [the conclusion of a treaty with Persia] is done.' Salisbury to Dufferin, 23 December 1879, SalP.

contained in the Gandamak treaty, provoked the Russians into remonstrance once again.<sup>51</sup> It was declared by Giers that Russia thought herself at liberty to go to Merv.<sup>52</sup> Salisbury, in turn, maintained that 'we do not regard Merv as territory which could properly be occupied by any European power.'<sup>53</sup> He was aware that the Turkomans might soon cease to hold the Merv oasis.<sup>54</sup> In view of such a probability, Salisbury was eager to look upon Persia as possessing a better historical claim on Merv than the Afghans.<sup>55</sup> Salisbury would have been satisfied if Persia could have been induced to incorporate Merv into her own territory with sufficient guarantee to safeguard the interests of the Turkomans. If, however, the Persians refused to abide by those terms, the Foreign Secretary would encourage 'the Hindoo merchants to sell Enfield rifles at Candahar' obviously to assist the resistance of the Turkomans.<sup>56</sup> Closely connected with the fate of Merv was Herat which, rightly or wrongly, was deemed to be the 'Key to India'. Here, Salisbury had already entered into a prolonged negotiation with Persia<sup>57</sup> with a view to enabling her to occupy it and retain it provided there were sufficient safeguards to British interests. He had already assured the Russian Foreign Ministry that the British would not move to Herat. Any move towards Herat, it was agreed, would justify a corresponding Russian advance towards Merv.<sup>58</sup> Lytton, on the other hand, would have

51. Salisbury to Cranbrook, 31 September 1879, SalP.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*

55. Cranbrook to Lytton, 3 September 1878, LyP. 516/3.

56. *Ibid.*

57. This is beyond the scope of the present work. For details of the negotiations the following documents may be consulted : Salisbury to Dufferin, 14 February 1870, SalP; Cranbrook to Salisbury, 10 August 1879, SalP; Cranbrook to Salisbury, 28 August 1879, SalP; Salisbury to Cranbrook, 2 January 1880, SalP; Salisbury to Cranbrook, 10 January 1880, SalP; Temple to Lytton, 10 January 1879, LyP. 519/7; Cranbrook to Temple, 19 January 1879, TemP. 17; Temple to Cranbrook, 2 December 1878, TemP. 6; Lytton to Layard, 25 January 1878, LayP. 38969; Salisbury : Memo on Lord Lytton's proposal to let Sher Ali take Herat, 11 March 1880, CranP. 269.

58. Such an agreement was rendered essential because of the practical difficulties involved in reaching Merv militarily. 'Schouvaloff always insists that if we went to Herat,' wrote Salisbury in justification of his move, 'they would go to Merv. It would quite possibly be a costly move on their

preferred a solution of the problem posed by Herat by means of an independent state of Western Afghanistan with Herat and Merv as its component parts.<sup>59</sup> But Herat had been adopted as a Foreign Office affair and this had considerably weakened Lytton's initiative. The Gandamak treaty made no reference to Herat's position; the Persians were encouraged to advance in that direction, and all through the course of the renewed Afghan expedition upon the assassination of Cavagnari, Lytton was forbidden to take any step to put Herat and its ruler Ayub Khan on a footing of definite relationship with the British.<sup>60</sup> It will be interesting to examine the quiet diplomacy that was initiated by the Foreign Office over the fate of Herat which by its very nature was inconsistent with the flamboyant aggression of Lytton. The fundamental assumption of Salisbury in Persia had always been that 'we do not want—we could not if we wished—to defend Persia against Russian aggression and yet while Persia lasts, it does not suit us to be without influence there.'<sup>61</sup> This was a problem which, according to Salisbury, was by no means insoluble, 'especially in an Oriental court.'<sup>62</sup> Salisbury was not in favour of a policy in Persia that would have given the war party in Russia an effective instrument. 'But short of that result it is wise,' he wrote, 'to foster our influence, to keep up the make-believe of our power to prevent the Russian party from being absolute mistress, or the Shah from complete despair.'<sup>63</sup> That being the case, Salisbury saw that the vital point to both Russia and Persia was Herat. So long as its fate remained undecided Persia would remain solicitous of possessing it and no mortification would have been inflicted upon the Russian position in Central Asia. But once its destiny was decided by conferring it on an ally the whole situation

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part. But we should be wholly incompetent to turn them out.' Salisbury to Loftus, 24 December 1878, No. 8, SalP.

59. Lytton to Layard, 25 January 1878, LayP. 38969.

60. John Strachey wrote: 'Afghan affairs do not look at all promising solely in consequence of the vile folly of the home government. Lord Salisbury is apparently coquetting with Persia about Herat and Seistan and consequently we are forbidden to give to Yakub Khan any guarantee of Afghan boundary as settled with Russia in Sher Ali's time.' John Strachey to Richard Strachey, 15 April 1872, StrP.

61. Salisbury to Derby, 10 November 1874, Private/Cabinet/Salisbury, DerP.

62. *Ibid.*

63. *Ibid.*

was bound to alter and would drive both of them together.<sup>64</sup> So long as only the enmity of Russia was to be faced, Salisbury was willing to take the risk of an arrangement with Persia over Herat. When, however, it appeared that Persia demanded more than was admissible, Salisbury decided to continue to feed Persia with expectations instead. It was true, as he himself would argue, that Herat could not for ever be dangled before Persia and in a year or two 'we have to repel their attempts to gain possession of the town'. Nevertheless, the delay thus imposed, wrote Salisbury, 'is of enormous value'. It would enable the British, he argued, to bring the railway to Farrah and Girishk and 'once so done we shall be able to repel them with little difficulty'.<sup>65</sup> Of course, Salisbury's scheme for both Merv and Herat was in line with his professed interest regarding southern and western Afghanistan. But judged from the Indian side, it contained a serious contradiction: a separate solution of the complication of Herat would have involved the disintegration of Afghanistan—a state of affairs which Salisbury himself was so desperately inclined to prevent. The uncertainty of the Foreign Office and the lukewarm support of the Home government had obviously weakened Lytton's initiative in Afghan matters. The directives of the Secretary of State had narrowed what room he had for manoeuvre.

But all this does not explain Lytton's failure to manage Afghan affairs as he had desired to. By the time he returned home it was quite evident that his experiment with a disintegrated Afghanistan was to be cast to the winds. The Liberals were committed to this. But the overriding consideration was that Lytton's experiment had shown little sign of a successful conclusion. His policy towards Afghanistan had been based on his view of the Afghan nation as a collection of tribes bound by no other ties than a loose tribal cohesion and kept together by a standing army—an innovation in Afghanistan and basically alien to its political life.<sup>66</sup>

64. '...You may keep the rival suitors quiet so long as the lady makes no choice: her choice once made, you must count upon the enmity of the rejected...I look upon the delay, therefore, as vital to us. If we can keep things quiet till we have the railways, we may solve the problems as we please. If we insist on forcing the matter to an issue now, we run a grave risk of an immediate war.' 11 March 1880, Salisbury's Memo, CranP. 269.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Hansard, third series, Vol. 257, p. 15.

He took note of the gradual development of monarchical despotism over a tribal substructure and the resentment of the injured aristocracy against the new trend of events.<sup>67</sup> In the Khelat affair, Lytton had appreciated the need to support the Khan as opposed to the Sardars about him.<sup>68</sup> In Afghanistan he would have adopted a similar policy but for the opposition of the Amir to a British umbrella. It appeared to the Viceroy that the Afghan aristocracy was in revolt against their ruler and this led him to resort to measures conducive to the disintegration of Afghanistan. In this he was determined to capitalise on the disaffection of the tribal chiefs who were resentful of their loss of power under the centralising rule of Sher Ali.

On the basis of such an interpretation of Afghan policy Lytton concluded that the four regions of Afghanistan were capable of developing distinct political lives under their natural rulers.<sup>69</sup> He was confident that such a pattern of political life in Afghanistan could well be brought into existence by steady pressure on Sher Ali's authority and, once the power of his army was rudely shaken, the different component parts of his territory would fall off by themselves.<sup>70</sup> The exclusion of the family of Sher Ali from power was an essential corollary of the proposed policy, while the evolution of distinct political leaderships in the different regions of Afghanistan appeared quite feasible. In Durrani pride and clan feeling the administration saw the only 'symptom resembling patriotism' in Afghanistan and it was believed that such a feeling was 'increasing with the hope of getting rid of the dominion of Kabul'.<sup>71</sup> Thus it was proclaimed that the British government had no quarrel with the Durranis as a tribe and that it was to the aggrandisement of the Ghilzais and the Wardaks that the downfall of Sher Ali and Yakub and 'the forced' occupation of the country were due.<sup>72</sup> In fact, all through the course of the war Lytton's objectives had a definite bias towards the eventual disintegration of Afghanistan.<sup>73</sup> The plan of

67. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518/3; Lytton to J. Strachey, 24 October 1878, LyP. 518/3.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518/3.

70. *Ibid.*

71. Lytton to Stephen, 20 January 1880, SteP. Box I.

72. St. John to Lyall, 29 December 1879, LyP. 10.

73. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518/3.

operation had two distinct stages : the occupation of certain vantage points in the winter of 1878-9, and the commencement of a more resolute campaign into the interior of Afghanistan in the ensuing spring in order ultimately to shatter the military and political authority of Sher Ali once and for all.<sup>74</sup>

Lytton, however, failed to achieve his objective. Though driven out from Kabul, Sher Ali was still the ruler, and died before he could be overthrown.<sup>75</sup> His son, upon his accession to the throne, offered an unsolicited alliance.<sup>76</sup> Lytton had no grievance against him although a recognition of his power was bound to affect adversely his programme for the disintegration of Afghanistan.<sup>77</sup> He tried in vain to persuade the India Office not to press for the recognition of Yakub.<sup>78</sup> The Cabinet would not have it. As a way out of the dilemma Lytton determined to demand very strict terms from Yakub and despite the opposition of London got his way in the Gandamak treaty.<sup>79</sup> A successful operation of the treaty meant a cautious policy. Either the tribes and the chiefs, who had helped the British army and who had been promised in return extensive benefits including freedom from Kabul rule, had to be provided with safe custody<sup>80</sup> or Yakub had to be supported against the self-seeking factions who were bound to assert themselves once the

74. Lytton to Cavagnari, 15 December 1878, LyP. 518/3.

75. P.P. Vol. LVI., 20 February 1872, p. 705.

76. *Ibid.*

77. For example, Kandahar could not be attacked from Kabul if negotiations were started with Yakub.

78. His choice was Wali Muhammad, who, 'unlike Sher Ali and Yakub', wrote Lytton, 'has never tasted the sweets of independence and will therefore face our control more amiably.' Lytton to Cranbrook, 2 February 1879, LyP. 518/5.

79. Apart from the demand for the withdrawal of authority from Pishin, Sibi, the Kurram and the Khyber, Lytton also demanded British control of Yakub's foreign policy. P.P. Vol. LVI, 6 March 1879. Besides, as an additional pressure on Yakub Lytton delayed the reply to Yakub until he knew that Roberts had moved towards Kabul, at Shutur Gurdan. Lytton to Haines, 18 March 1869, LyP. 518/4.

80. There were numerous tribes who had been promised and they had to be satisfied before any settlement could be arrived at in Afghanistan. For details of these unfulfilled engagements, see 'A memorandum on the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan', Quazi, Abdul-I-Badir LyP. 10.

effective ruler died without any worthy successor in view.<sup>81</sup> Lytton preferred to do neither. There was no clause in the Gandamak Treaty to guarantee the safe custody of the treacherous chiefs against the vengeance of the Barakzai ruler.<sup>82</sup> The Khyberis, who had been promised independence and British protection, were left at Yakub's mercy.<sup>83</sup> Nor would Lytton refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of the country.<sup>84</sup> Thus, Cavagnari upon his arrival in Kabul indulged in local intrigues and encouraged the growth of an idea in the popular imagination that the real ruler was the British ambassador stationed at Balla Hissar.<sup>85</sup> The high-handedness of Cavagnari rivalled that of Lytton and it was his unprovoked firing upon the dissatisfied soldiers that led to the unfortunate incident of 3 September 1879.<sup>86</sup> The massacre of the British mission was tragic. But it provided Lytton with an excuse to put his programme into practice.<sup>87</sup> The Home authorities could no longer prevent the disintegration of Afghanistan.<sup>88</sup> But after more than six months of military operations the goal seemed as distant as

81. It seems that Daud Shah, Mustafi and Yahiya Khan all conspired to bring Yakub into direct confrontation with the British. Memorandum of the principal information regarding the political situation at Kabul compiled from the papers received before 3 September 1880, LyP. 10.
82. See text of the treaty in Appendix.
83. As far as Yakub's treatment of these chiefs is concerned, consult *ibid*; also 'A Memorandum on the reign of Amir Sher Ali reform written by Qazi Abdul-i-Qadir, an Afghan of Peshawar'. LyP.
84. As regards the instructions to Cavagnari, John Strachey wrote 'I am almost the only person in the world, who knows this that Cavagnari has got carte blanche to bribe and corrupt Yakub Khan's advisers.' John to Richard Strachey, 26 January 1879, StrP.
85. For a good sympathetic narrative of Cavagnari's role in Kabul see 'A Memorandum on the reign of Sher Ali Khan, written by Qazi Abdul-i-Qadir, an Afghan of Peshawar', LyP.
86. *Ibid.*
87. Cf Burne to Lytton, 26 September 1879, LyP. 517/7.
88. 'I am delighted to see,' wrote Stephen to Lytton, that I was mistaken as to the manner in which John Bull would take the murder at Cabul. He has shown much more really patriotic spirit and much less disposition to turn an abominable crime committed against English people into an offence by English people than I expected. I need not say I am rejoiced at it. I think too that the good news from the Cape (which I take it may be regarded as final) will work practically to your advantage. The Government will get the benefit of it and will not, I think, be turned out of office just yet.' 25 September 1879, SteP., Box 1.

ever. No doubt, the political decision in favour of making Yakub responsible for the massacre<sup>89</sup>, his forced abdication,<sup>90</sup> the representation of the resistance of the population of Kabul to the invading army as rebellion,<sup>91</sup> the declaration of martial law and the indiscriminate hanging of all vaguely connected with the resistance and all suspected of abetting the massacre of the mission were calculated to break the backbone of Afghan resistance.<sup>92</sup> It merely infuriated them and provided the uprising of the Ghilzais with martyrs for the cause of the family of Sher Ali.<sup>93</sup> It is significant that the nucleus of the resistance was to be members of Sher Ali's family, however minor and ineffectual they might have been.

By January 1880 Roberts was fully convinced that the rising of the Afghan people was mainly owing to Yakub's deportation.<sup>94</sup> 'Our hold of the country,' he wrote, after an exhausting operation of about four months, 'generally completely shaken, probably cannot be re-established during the winter, while distant military operations are impossible.'<sup>95</sup> It was maintained by the insurgents that Cavagnari's murder had been accidental and against the wishes of

89. Cf. 'Report on Massacre at Cabul in September, 1879', A.R. Thompson, A.C. Lyall and D. Fitzpatrick, printed for the use of Cabinet, GladP. 44624, ff. 1-6.

90. *Ibid.*

91. See Cranbrook's criticisms of Roberts' action in Kabul in Cranbrook to Lytton, 31 January 1880, LyP. 516/P.

92. The executions at Kabul were based on the following charges—(a) participation in the murderous attack upon the British embassy or conspiracy, (b) being found, after due warning, in possession of arms within certain prohibited areas of the British camp, (c) inciting disturbance and (d) mutilation of wounded soldiers not engaged in hostility. In his private correspondence Lytton wrote that Roberts' proclamation had been 'written and approved by the Government of India'. Lytton to Harrison, 22 February 1880, LyP. 518/6. 'I am afraid,' wrote Cranbrook, 'that the Indian authorities may be quoted for I have had the opportunity of seeing some private letters of theirs which will furnish arms to our enemies.' Cranbrook to Lytton, 31 January 1880, LyP. 516/5.

93. See for the character of the Afghan opposition, Roberts to Lytton, 8 January 1880, LyP. 519/13a; Roberts to Lytton, 25 January 1880, LyP. 518/5; Cranbrook to Lytton, 31 January 1880, LyP. 516/5; 'Memorandum on the Western Afghanistan', O.B. St. John, 2 December 1879, LyP; St. John to Lyall, 8 December 1880, LyP.

94. Roberts to Lytton, 25 January 1880, LyP. 516/5.

95. *Ibid.*; also see Viceroy to Secy. of State, 16 January 1880, LyP. 517/9.

Afghanistan was more than a geographical expression. Nationalism, a modern concept, was unknown. Still, there was a sense of belonging and of emotional integrity, fostered by a common religion and a long-standing historical and cultural experience which made it more than a collection of tribal loyalties. The concept of *Izzat* was inter-woven with the common law of that land. *Pushtunwali* was more than a set of convenient rules; it was an essential code of conduct.<sup>106</sup> It was permissible for an Afghan chief to seek assistance to redress his grievances. And yet, it was obnoxious to allow a foreign power to dominate Afghan life. There was a remarkable respect for leadership. But it was expected to be both efficient and well-tried. In short, although there was considerable disaffection in some quarters against the increasing centralisation of Sher Ali, such feelings were counterbalanced by a sincere respect for the strong and efficient ruler whose friendship had been solicited by such mighty powers as Russia and Britain.<sup>107</sup> Besides, there was a steady broadening of the base of political authority in Kabul. The rule of the Barakzais and of Sher Ali, in particular, was not a Durrani-centred administration. While the Durrani aristocracy was gradually being deprived of its traditional powers, Sher Ali had set himself the task of creating a more compact political loyalty based on the efficiency of and confidence in the Amir. The Ghilzais, the Wardaks, sections of the Yusufzais and even the Hazaras, were being integrated into the new pattern based on firm obedience to the interests of the King and Afghanistan.<sup>108</sup> Lytton was soon to have to contend with the new forces in Kabul. Even in Kandahar, Sher Ali, his nominee, failed to obtain a working mandate from the people. Before long he was pleading for the retention of the British army for his sheer survival.<sup>109</sup> As had been pointed out by Lyall, the commitment undertaken by the British government in Kandahar was much more substantial than Lytton wanted the Home government to believe.<sup>110</sup> 'It is necessary to say,' wrote Lyall, 'that having recognised him, for our own purposes, as an independent ruler of Kandahar, and having declared that our troops would remain to

<sup>106.</sup> Cf. Elphinstone, *Kabul etc.* op. cit., Vol. I, Book II, ch. II, pp. 210-235.

<sup>107.</sup> S. John, 'Memorandum on Southern Afghanistan', undated LyP. 10.

<sup>108.</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109.</sup> St. John to Lyall, 21 June 1880, LyP. 10.

<sup>110.</sup> Lytton's 'Minute for circulation among the Council members', 20 February 1880, LyP. 10.

the Amir and the Sardars, that the Amir and the people were still anxious to remain friendly with the British and the Amir accordingly had visited the British camp.<sup>96</sup> Naturally, the deposition and the deportation of Yakub were viewed as arbitrary and the failure to recognise Musa Khan as the legitimate heir to the throne made them suspicious of Lytton's designs.<sup>97</sup> The Afghan leaders made it clear that they would go on fighting unless Yakub was restored and stated their readiness to abide by any engagement he might make with the British.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, Lytton was determined to ensure the future pattern of the distribution of power beyond the north-western frontier of India on the following lines : Kabul retained by the British, Kandahar a protected state, Herat Persian, and Balkh semi-Russianised.<sup>99</sup> Such a view of the situation was adopted by both the Government of India and the Home government.<sup>100</sup> The Foreign Office was thinking in terms of coming to an understanding with Russia over Balkh once complications at Kabul were settled for good.<sup>101</sup> The correspondence with Persia over Herat was in progress, despite the obstacles raised by Persia under the inspiration and fear of Russia.<sup>102</sup> In Kandahar, Lytton discovered one Sher Ali to serve his purpose and a treaty was concluded with him which placed that prosperous province under British protection.<sup>103</sup> The railway line moved briskly towards Kandahar through Bolan and Sibi.<sup>104</sup> It was further decided to evacuate northern Afghanistan by the following October so as to enable the development of a strong political authority in Kabul by means of natural selection.<sup>105</sup> As evidenced by the course of events Lytton's scheme of things, however brilliant it might seem in theory, lacked the essentials of political realism and betrayed a remarkable ignorance of the nature of the Afghan polity.

96. Enclosure in *ibid.*

97. *Ibid.*

98. Lytton to Stephen, 20 January 1880, SteP. Box I.

99. Lyall to Lepel Griffin, 27 April 1880, LyP. 522/6.

100. Lytton's 'Minute' for circulation among the Council members, 14 Dec. 1879, LyP. 10.

101. Salisbury to Dufferin, 4 February 1880, SalP.

102. *Ibid.*

103. For a critical assessment of the treaty obligations see St. John to Lyall, 21 June 1880, LylP. 10.

104. Lytton's 'Minute', 14 December 1879, LyP. 10.

105. *Ibid.*

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<sup>108.</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109.</sup> St. John to Lyall, 21 June 1880, LyP. 10.

<sup>110.</sup> Lytton's 'Minute for circulation among the Council members', 20 February 1880, LyP. 10.

assist him in establishing himself, we cannot, in my opinion, but admit the engagement to defend the Wali against the external enemies who may advance against him with the object of overthrowing him. Nor would it be generally consistent with good faith that we should stand by and allow him to fall by domestic insurrection, before his authority has been consolidated and no substantial distinction could be drawn between an attack upon Sher Ali from his enemies in Herat and an outbreak of rebellion by factions within his territory.<sup>111</sup> This proved to be the case when Ayub managed to defeat the British army at Maiwand<sup>112</sup> and proceeded to occupy Kandahar.

But the most serious complications lay in Kabul which Lytton had thought of evacuating by October, 1880. Lytton was eager to commence the operation soon after Stewart had joined forces with Roberts, thus completing the evacuation of Kabul in July preparatory to the evacuation of Northern Afghanistan by October.<sup>113</sup> As regards the settlement of the political question, Lytton had authorised Griffin to confine all correspondence with Abdul Rahman to a simple letter or message telling him that having done all 'we wanted in Northern Afghanistan, we are leaving Kabul, which he is free to enter and occupy if he pleases—without apprehensions from us.'<sup>114</sup> It was implied that Kandahar and the districts assigned under the Gandamak Treaty were irrevocably severed from Kabul power and any attempt on its part to recover them or to intrigue against their arrangement would again involve Abdur Rahman in hostilities with the British government.<sup>115</sup> Subject to this decision, Lytton was ready at once to recognise and, if necessary, support any ruler who might show himself strong enough to establish authority and maintain order both in Kabul and Herat.<sup>116</sup> 'We have,' wrote Lytton, 'absolutely no conditions to make with Abdul Rahman—no concessions to ask or grant—no cause, and no desire or intention of anything like negotiation or bargain with him about his movements or our own.'<sup>117</sup>

- 111. Memorandum on St. John's letter, 21 June 1880, LyP. 10.
- 112. On 20 July 1880. For the subsequent settlement of problems raised by the success of Ayub, see Singhal, *India and Afghanistan, op. cit.*, ch. 6.
- 113. See Lyall to Griffin, 27 April 1880, LyP. 522/6; also Lytton's 'Minute for circulation among the Council members', 14 December 1879, LyP. 10.
- 114. Lyall to Griffin, 27 April 1880, LyP. 522/6; also 'Minute by Viceroy', 5 June 1880, LyP.
- 115. *Ibid.*
- 116. Lyall to Griffin, 27 April 1880, LyP. 522/6.
- 117. 'Minute by Viceroy', 5 June 1880, LyP. 10.

The decision of the government was final and it was arrived at in January when Abdul Rahman had not yet arrived on the scene.<sup>118</sup> It was communicated to Griffin, who was to carry it out and who had been told that the decision of the government was not subject to any suggestion of Griffin's in any way.<sup>119</sup> When Abdul Rahman arrived on the scene, Lytton instructed Griffin to communicate with him, but to be careful to avoid any appearance of negotiation with or overtures to that Sardar.<sup>120</sup> To Lytton's disappointment, Griffin was soon to find that unless the friendship of Abdul Rahman or some other ruler was previously secured, the troops could not leave Kabul without serious risk of disgrace.<sup>121</sup> Hence the government was urged to address an ultimatum to Abdul Rahman, and if it were rejected, not to lose a moment in proclaiming some other ruler, attacking Abdul Rahman and driving him out of the country.<sup>122</sup> The soldiers in command were eager to dismiss what Griffin thought about military risk as 'pure rubbish'. So was Lytton. But the fact remained that the political adviser, who had been sent to rectify the situation into which General Roberts had led the British troops, considered that there was no way out of Kabul without a political settlement prior to withdrawal. As Griffin made clear, the intimation of withdrawal to Abdul Rahman involved specific conditions,<sup>123</sup> and Griffin's letters and messages to the Sardar 'had convinced him that the British government were in want of his alliance and consequently he was in a position to dictate terms.'<sup>124</sup> The Sardar knew the reasons for the dismemberment of Sher Ali's Afghanistan. He was, therefore, eager to know what would be the result of a Russian envoy being again accredited to the court of Kabul. Would his removal be merely the subject of correspondence between the Courts of St. James' and St. Petersburg or would Abdul Rahman be ordered to expel him and his refusal or inability to do so be a *casus belli*? The Sardar felt that a certain line of conduct was expected of him by the British government towards his formidable neighbour

118. Extract from a letter from Viceroy to General Stewart, 29 May 1880, No. 115, LyP. 522/6.

119. 'Minute by Viceroy', 5 June 1880, LyP.

120. Lyall to Griffin, 27 April 1880, LyP. 522/6.

121. Lytton to Cranbrook, 18 June 1880, CranP. 269.

122. *Ibid.*

123. Griffin to Stewart, 24 May 1880; 18 June 1880, LyP.

124. Lytton to Cranbrook, CranP. 269.

to the north, that this line of conduct was virtually the condition of his appointment, and he was naturally desirous to know what this line was expected to be.<sup>125</sup> From the 14th and following paragraphs of the Foreign Secretary's letter to Griffin<sup>126</sup> it was clear that exclusion of foreign influence remained the settled policy of the Government of India. The 20th paragraph of the same letter, however, insisted on the willingness of the government to 'deal with such matters' if, and in case, foreign influence penetrated Afghanistan. Naturally, the Sardar was eager to dispel the uncertainty of his relationship with the British before he moved to Kabul. The very presence of Abdul Rahman on Afghan territory with Russian money and arms was a direct violation of the engagements of Russia with Britain. Besides, it was uncertain whether the Gandamak treaty was still in force. 'The occurrence of war,' as Griffin wrote, 'does not necessarily abrogate a treaty, unless another agreement, subsequently drawn, modifies or cancels its conditions.' On this point the Foreign Secretary's letter left considerable room for doubts and speculations. The fifth paragraph of the letter, for example, stated that the massacre of the envoy had dissolved the treaty of Gandamak, while paragraphs ten and nineteen seemed to infer that it was still in force, and that the territory to be occupied by the British government would be those districts assigned under that treaty. It was essential to know whether the treaty of Gandamak was entirely abrogated or was partially or wholly in force and, if only partially so, what clauses were still in force. It was on these grounds that the policy of withdrawal without condition and prior settlement seemed to Griffin fairly impracticable. Unless the points at issue were clarified Abdul Rahman was disposed to wait, 'for he has a vantage point in that we wish to return and leave Afghanistan and he can afford to wait.' Apart from the impossibility of leaving the country without being molested there was the serious risk of a renewed campaign for the security of the British protege in Kandahar as Abdul Rahman was in no mood to reconcile himself to the loss of that prosperous province.<sup>127</sup>

General Stewart wrote from Kabul that friendship with the British government was to be a necessary condition for the selection

125. Griffin to Stewart, 24 May 1880; 18 June 1880, LyP. 10; also Lytton to Griffin, 6 March 1880, LyP. 522/6.

126. Lyall to Griffin, 27 April 1880, LyP. 522/6.

127. Griffin to Stewart, 24 May 1880; 18 June 1880, LyP.

of the candidate for the throne of Kabul and on the reception of the letter of Abdul Rahman he felt that it was necessary to give a definite pledge to the candidate.<sup>128</sup> It was true, wrote Stewart, that he had been precluded from entering into negotiations with Abdul Rahman in the ordinary sense of the term. 'But we must nevertheless be prepared,' he added, 'to give written and distinct answers to any question that may be put to us.'<sup>129</sup> And there were many such questions. Major St. John from Kandahar felt that it was desirable to allow Abdul Rahman to hold Herat, 'which may half-reconcile him to the loss of Kandahar'.<sup>130</sup> And as for the settlement of Northern Afghanistan, things would have remained in a state of anarchy. Thus, on the basis of practical difficulties, Griffin insisted that 'the Government of India might not believe in the discovery of a friendly ruler of Kabul, still we must pretend that we have discovered him, and we must, to him and others in Afghanistan, insist on this being the condition of his appointment.' Abdul Rahman must be appointed, he added, 'as a friendly ruler or not at all'.<sup>131</sup> In fact, Lytton's instructions to Griffin only confirmed the impracticable nature of the Viceroy's project.

Of course, Lytton had, by then, realised that no solid rule could be established in Afghanistan without 'some kind of natural selection resulting in the survival of the fittest'.<sup>132</sup> This 'necessary, and in the long run inevitable, process is stopped,' he added, 'by our presence at Kabul—and, as our presence at Kabul cannot be permanent, the process is only postponed, not prevented'.<sup>133</sup> Lord Lawrence, he was to argue, had allowed anarchy and bloodshed to reign for years in Afghanistan. 'He was, I think, quite right,' Lytton finally came to appreciate, 'in not thrusting upon Sher Ali or his brother uninvited offers of assistance—his fault as a statesman was the repeated rejection of spontaneous and urgent appeals for reasonable assistance which, if given in time, would have ended the anarchy and secured a friend'.<sup>134</sup> The so-called anarchy, Lytton was to argue, would probably not last a month before the means of stopping it would be

128. Stewart to Lyall, 8 May 1880, LyP. 10.

129. Stewart to Lyall, 31 May 1880, LyP. 10.

130. Viceroy to General Stewart, 28 May 1880, LyP. 10.

131. Enclosure in Lytton to Cranbrook, 18 June 1880, CranP. 269.

132. *Ibid.*

133. *Ibid.*

134. *Ibid.*

similarly offered, by spontaneous appeals for aid.<sup>135</sup> Thus, he maintained that no settlement was possible till 'we are out of the country, or so long as any party in the country supposes that we cannot leave Kabul without first having settled terms with it or its rivals.'<sup>136</sup> It was small wonder that Lytton was eager to shift the responsibility for the fiasco on to the weak government of Ripon and 'the insane policy' of Griffin.<sup>137</sup> He maintained that any government adopting the policy recommended by him would have been accused of leaving Afghanistan in anarchy. But such an accusation, he wrote, could be easily disposed of. 'The first duty of the Government of India is to do what is best for its own subjects and soldiers, not what is best for the Afghans.'<sup>138</sup> The Viceroy's eloquence, as usual, was impressive. His arguments, however, should have been more convincing. Only a short time earlier he had confessed, in a mood of despondency, that the real solution of the Afghan question lay in securing Kandahar and the Peshawar-Kurram valley.<sup>139</sup> This was what Salisbury had instructed him to aim at. But Lytton had fixed his eyes on Kabul, the master key to India. The 'mountain wall', the passes and the glacis were still to be effectively held. The Kabul campaign had failed to secure an ally commanding a reasonable mandate of the Afghans. The Peshawar and Kurram valleys could have been secured by a general proclamation and kept as an indispensable guarantee of the Amir's good behaviour. Indeed, Kandahar could have been best secured, as had been suggested by Salisbury, by diplomacy and intrigue if the Amir failed to co-operate with Lytton. In the existing circumstances it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain in Kandahar a British dupe, threatened by Abdul Rahman, who was the focal point of a popular anti-British feeling.<sup>140</sup> As it happened, Ripon was to confirm the negotiation with Abdul Rahman initiated by Griffin, and the failure of Sher Ali against Ayub meant the end of Kandahar as an independent buffer.<sup>141</sup> The British initiative in Afghanistan was soon to be followed by a corresponding move by Russia towards Penjdeh.<sup>142</sup>

135. Lytton to Griffin, 6 May 1880, LyP. 522/6.

136. Lytton to Cranbrook, 18 June 1880, CranP. 269.

137. *Ibid.*

138. *Ibid.*

139. Lytton to Cranbrook, 20 May 1880, CranP. 269.

140. Stewart to Lytton, 19 May 1880, LyP. 10.

141. Singhal, *op. cit.* chh. 5 and 6.

142. *Ibid.* ch. 8.

The railway lines from Sind were far from Herat. Of course, there was some progress towards the scientific frontier by the acquisition of Sibi. But the memories of the war and the Kabul massacre were to last. The effects of such episodes were to add more confusion to Anglo-Afghan relations.

Lytton left India in April 1880 and it was upon his departure that the Afghan complication was brought to a reasonable settlement. To the disappointment of the ex-Viceroy, Lepel Griffin had been retained in his political assignment at Kabul and a renewed attempt to cultivate Abdul Rahman resulted in a treaty relation based on a system of mutual obligations. By the turn of the year it was also decided that Kandahar ought to be united with Kabul. The reversal of Lytton's policy was complete. The only redeeming feature in the whole affair, as Lytton saw it, was that Ripon, contrary to the expressed wish of the Home government, retained Sibi and Herat. Thus ended an exciting phase in Anglo-Afghan relations.<sup>143</sup>

## 8 | Conclusion

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The third quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed a fresh impulse in the history of European expansion in Asia. It was an age of gunboat diplomacy in the Far Eastern waters, of renewed expansive initiatives undertaken from the frontiers of British India, of the consolidation of the French empire in Indo-China, of the hesitant entry of the United States of America onto the Asian stage and of the unprecedented restlessness of Russia along the fluctuating frontiers in Central Asia. In a sense the circular of Prince Gortchakoff, issued in 1864, was a European manifesto with sinister implications for the people of Asia. In fact, by the 1860s there were many at the imperial table while the cake was running short for all of them. As a consequence new means of domination—treaty ports, extra-territorial rights, spheres of influence, military lines, scientific frontiers, neutral zones, and buffer states—with all their nuances—were developed in the vocabulary of international politics. The realities and fantasies of an Asian Eldorado drew the Europeans into the so-called no man's lands and the European governments found themselves stoutly defending the rights of their citizens to get their throats cut wherever they found it necessary. The present study is an attempt to examine this 'great game' in Asia with reference to Afghanistan against the background of the imperial chess-board of Central Asia. The period this book deals with begins with a concerted attempt by Great Britain and Russia to come to a negotiated settlement with regard to Afghanistan. It concludes with the flamboyant extravagance of Lytton's Afghan adventure. The Afghan problem, nevertheless, remained : both Curzon and Kitchener were to project the nineteenth century Russophobia into the world of the twentieth; and a third war was still to be fought over the fate of what the poet turned diplomat in charge of the destiny of the extrovert Raj had characterised as the 'land of stones and scoundrels'.

The one fear that seemed to have agitated the minds of the politicians, administrators and generals, during the period of the present study, concerned the floating frontiers of the two imperial systems across the somewhat uncertain contours of the Central Asian land mass inhabited by unknown horsemen of conflicting loyalties and ill-defined interests. The Indian officials were apt to exaggerate its inherent dangers, while London remained relatively quiet, and often minimised them. But no one could have ignored the potentialities of the threat. It was the prospect of a coterminous European frontier in the unknown sandhills of Central Asia which unnerved men in authority, cutting across political affiliations. It was almost universally held that unless something was done, either diplomatically or militarily, the irresistible avalanche of the Cossack army could not be checked even by the united opposition of the Turkoman tribes.

It was held in responsible quarters (although rather vaguely, until Lytton examined this view at great length) that the establishment of a scientific frontier was indispensable for an effective offensive thrust against the Russian Empire in the East. True, Britain and Russia mutually appreciated each other's imperial obligations in Asia : Clarendon recognised and approved of Gortchakoff's problems and programmes in Central Asia, while Lytton was eager to make a virtue of a necessity. 'It would seem prudent and politic on our part', he wrote, in an attempt to soothe the nervous anxiety of the men in London, 'to make a virtue of necessity and hold such language to Russia as may serve to strengthen our remonstrances against her advance in other directions, by the disavowals of an opposition, which cannot be practically enforced. . . . ~~inconspicuous~~ progress along the western

but it was not vulnerable. It determined to make suitable adjustments in its military logistics and diplomatic postures. It was supremely convinced of the outcome of the confrontation, if there were any. 'Russia hardly seems', wrote Mayo, 'to be aware of the dangerous game she is trying to play in Central Asia. She looks to the history of our success in Hindoostan and is apparently inclined to follow our steps—but she forgets that the circumstances of the Countries and Nations she proposes to deal with are widely different—no millions of mild Hindoos—quiet and taxable—inhabiting vast and fertile plains—no such differences of race and religion as enable us to play off Mahomedan, Sikh and Hindoo or Buddhist against each other.'<sup>2</sup> On the contrary, Russia was faced with millions of poor, fanatical and warlike races inhabiting almost inaccessible mountains or half-desert plains. The annual parliamentary reports on the moral and material progress of India helped to emphasise in the British mind the superiority of its imperial hegemony in India, in sharp contrast to the isolated Russian posts in Central Asia stoutly defended by its pioneers in their desperate loneliness.

And yet, no one, not even Northbrook, Granville or Derby, could overlook the fact that Central Asia would ultimately be absorbed by the two Empires creating a coterminous frontier—a prospect marked by the inevitability of a Greek tragedy. The Russian conquest of Kokand, for example, would have brought the Russians into immediate contact with Kashgar on the one hand and Badakshan and the Oxus on the other. The British had no options; they helplessly looked on. If the local uprising in Kokand, led by a leader of proved ability, succeeded in providing the state with some semblance of credibility the British could breathe a sigh of relief. Immediate contact between the two Empires could then be postponed for a while. But there was an air of uncertainty in the calculations of the British Foreign Office. It was taken for granted by all that no lasting peace in Kokand, and for that matter in any part of Central Asia, could be forecast. The intense hatred of the Kiptchaks and the nomads for the sedentary population would have forced Kundayar Khan, the Kokandi ruler, to be on civil and amenable terms with the Russians, opening fresh channels of continual interference, much to the discomfiture of men like Loftus. Derby was

2. Mayo to Buchanan, 10 August 1869, B.P. In Letter : 1869.

uneasy about the Tsar who, despite a peaceful disposition, was 'eagerly governed' as in the Khivan case, and appeared much too ready to let his inferiors 'drag him through dirt in which he probably would not have set foot on his own accord'.<sup>3</sup> A feeling of uneasiness in an atmosphere of resignation to reality enveloped the Foreign Office and the India Office alike. 'If our Indian governors had all been soldiers', Derby was to indulge himself, 'and not kept in check from home, we should have annexed all Southern Asia'.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, there was a desperate attempt by all concerned to prove that the British Government 'was more afraid of the Russians than we need be'. The Russians, confronted as they were with warlike people in 'an enormous tract of country' had 'quite as much fear from a collision with us as we can have'.<sup>5</sup> Of course, a fixed boundary in Central Asia was one day bound to come to stay. The problem was whether one was to take an initiative to delineate it or to occupy advanced posts to improve one's commanding position both at the conference table and on the battle ground. To have diplomacy operating in isolation was an ill-conceived policy; as an exclusive instrument it was inadequate. 'It is a fool's bargain to enter into an engagement which we feel ourselves bound to honour,' wrote Derby, 'while the other party will break it without a moment's hesitation'.<sup>6</sup>

The uncertainty of the British about the objectives of the Russians in central Asia was almost endemic. Saunders, Lumley, Forsyth, Cowley and Rawlinson defined British interests; printed them on the Central Asian map; examined, with proficiency, the prospects of Indian tea and British piece goods in Central Asia; and demanded lines of frontier on behalf of an Uzbeg chieftain or a Kashgar ruler of uncertain future. But none of them could delineate, with a modicum of authenticity, the Russian programme in Central Asia. They identified some signposts and a few landmarks but they underlined their discoveries much too heavily, and, as a result, the details of the canvas of Russian activities got blurred in the eyes of the Foreign Office. A distinct confusion was reflected in the proceedings of the India and Foreign Offices; an element of unreality was echoed in the periodical cry of the Russophobes—'the Russians are coming'.

3. Derby to Loftus, 7 October 1874, Private/Loftus, DerP.

4. Derby to Loftus, 3 March 1874, Secret/Salisbury, DerP.

5. Derby to Salisbury, 15 November 1874, Secret/Salisbury, DerP.

6. Derby to Loftus, 7 October 1874, Private/Loftus, DerP.

The dread of the common frontier, the uncertainty of Russian objectives, the weakness of the north-west border of British India, the readiness on the part of both Russia and Britain to come to an amicable settlement regarding Central Asia and the desire to postpone the inevitable coterminous frontier in Central Asia means of a phased programme of conquest and consolidation serve to keep the dialogue between London and St. Petersburg open throughout the period of the present study. As Kabul became part of the Eastern Question, British objectives in Afghanistan could only be achieved after traversing the cunning corridors and contrive passages of European diplomacy.

It may be remembered that the object Mayo had always had in mind was to make Central Asia too hot for Russia to dance upon. The recognition of Sher Ali, the conclusion of the Ambala conference growing cordiality between India and Afghanistan and the personal ascendancy of the Viceroy over the mind and policies of the Barakzai ruler were measures adopted by Mayo in order to achieve his objectives. The close communication between him and Buchanan the British ambassador in St. Petersburg, the direct diplomatic initiative adopted by Mayo with the despatch of Forsyth on a mission to Russia, and the consistent defence of Afghan interests in defining the boundaries of Afghanistan, whether on the Oxus, towards Herat or in Seistan, were essential features of Mayo's management of Afghanistan. He would have no truck with the concept of neutrality in Afghanistan ; in the context of Central Asia such a zone was not acceptable. 'It is the expression of a very strong feeling in the Council in favour of a Zone of independent States between our frontiers and that of Russia', Mayo maintained, in opposition to the proposed neutral zone, 'but there is an equally strong feeling against the absolute neutralisation of any state which touches our frontier'. He urged that Russia be called upon to place herself in the same position regarding Khiva, the unoccupied part of Bukhara and the independent tribes along the frontier, as the Indian government was willing to do as regards Khelat, Afghanistan and Yarkand. In other words, the policy thus recommended meant that Britain and Russia ought to recognise and secure the independence of these states 'but continue to exercise over them friendly influence with an unquestioned power of punishing them, if they misbehaved'. If the Russians

7. Mayo to Argyll, 3 June 1869, M.P. 35/2.

consented to this, Mayo wrote optimistically, 'I am inclined to believe that the Central Asian question would cease to exist'.<sup>8</sup>

In opposition to the Liberal administration at home, Mayo stuck to his guns. Indeed, he caused many flutters in the Cabinet. Argyll, Clarendon, Granville and even Gladstone felt uneasy at the extension of British commitments in Afghanistan under Mayo. 'Sooner than we expected we find from the result of those late transactions', Argyll lamented, 'that though the two Empires of England and Russia are not in contact as regards the bodies of the planets, yet as regards the atmospheres, they are in contact and we must proceed very warily indeed in any step we may take'.<sup>9</sup> As Forsyth proceeded to St. Petersburg he found the opposition of the Home government to the Indian move very formidable. The India Office knew almost nothing about the status of Forsyth or the actual possessions of Sher Ali. Argyll was most jittery. 'I am distrustful', he protested strongly, 'of any bargaining by which we should be committed to that limit as constituting the whole of Afghanistan'.<sup>10</sup> The Foreign Office reacted more sharply. Unless the Indian government was kept quiet, it had no doubt that there would be trouble in Central Asia, for the Government of India seemed disposed to excite it. Hammond was convinced that the Indian government was prone to counteract possible intrigues by counter-intrigues. He was concerned to find, 'that the Government at Home cannot keep so close a watch on what the Indian government may do or propose'.<sup>11</sup>

Northbrook looked upon Afghanistan and the Central Asian Question with marked detachment. He took a narrow view of the Afghan situation. He did not share the optimism of Mayo in locating in Afghanistan an entrepot of the vast untapped market of Central Asia. A united Afghanistan under a strong and friendly ruler seemed to him a contradiction in terms. He was pleased to find the temporising hands of the Home government eager to restrain any excesses on his own part. In 1873 he agreed to share the views of the Home government in the face of the charge of the Afghan ruler that 'we do not at all share his alarm and consider that there is no cause for it'.<sup>12</sup> On the contrary, the Amir was assured that 'we shall

8. Mayo to Rawlinson, 10 June 1869, M.P. 35/9.

9. Argyll to Mayo, 4 June 1869, M.P. 6.

10. Argyll to Granville, 20 January 1872, GranP. 51.

11. Hammond to Clarendon, 24 August 1869, ClarP. C. 503.

12. India, 24 July 1873, P.P. 1873-9, LVIC, 2190, p. 103.

maintain our settled policy in favour of Afghanistan if he abides by our advice in External Affairs'.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Northbrook entered into the spirit of the Punjabee tradition with an uneasy conscience. Unable to retain the Afghan confidence, and even to freeze Anglo-Afghan relations at the level reached under Mayo's Viceroyalty, Northbrook offered increasingly the spectacle of a defeated man seeking to shift his responsibility onto the shoulders of others. The pressure exerted by Salisbury to resuscitate the declining Anglo-Afghan relations with a necessary *quid pro quo* took Northbrook by surprise. He was unwilling to put the new policy into force. Instead, he carried on an irksome and prolonged controversy with the Secretary of State seeking explanations of the proposed policy, defending his do-nothing postures and urging the Foreign Office to pull the chestnut for him out of Kauffman's fire. He did not appreciate the fact that the Afghan question had become 'a department of the Great Russian Question' and that the enlarged problem could no longer accommodate itself into the masterly-inactivity pigeon hole.

Lytton revived the issue. But if Mayo had worked for a gradual ascendancy over Afghanistan Lytton resorted to forcing the issue during the tenure of his office in India. A triumphant march of the British army into the heart of Central Asia, backed by the Indian feudatories and supported by the anti-Russian forces of the Muslim world, was his ultimate objective.<sup>14</sup> British India was characterised as a Muslim power<sup>15</sup>; there were some feverish attempts to link the Eastern Question to the problems of Asia; the Muslim community in India was encouraged to support the Porte against the Russians; and petitions were forwarded to London urging an energetic policy in support of Turkey.<sup>16</sup>

A united Muslim resistance to Russia under the leadership of Great Britain became an obsession with Lytton's administration. 'We have only to give a signal', wrote Temple, 'and the newly conquered Mahomedans of these provinces (Turkistan) will rise and expel the Russians'.<sup>17</sup> It was believed that some inexpensive expeditions might be arranged from India to rouse the Muslims of Central Asia. Thus

13. *Ibid.*

14. Lytton to Stephen, 2 June 1877, SteP. Box III.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Government of India to Secretar State, 3 April 1878, S1M 4.

17. Temple to Lytton, 23 September 1878, LyP. 522/2.

the Russians could be struck at many points, sufficient to cripple the enemy permanently. Approving the policy of Lytton, Stephen wrote that Turkey would certainly prove to be the hardest nut to crack 'that has ever got into the jaws of the bear', and if Britain was forced to join issue with Russia, Lytton would be able to give them a 'terrible dig from the south and the east'.<sup>18</sup>

The wrath of the empire builders was intense at the irresponsible interference of the Parliament in the affairs of the empire, 'exhibiting ourselves in the character of Russia's vilest jackal, villainising with self-complacency on the small pickings left to us by our new ally from the plunder of our old ones'.<sup>19</sup> They were disgusted by the worthlessness of the 'little Englanders and the dishonest politicians, Mr. Gladstone and Co.', soaked in 'the spirit of Birmingham and Manchester' and 'smothered under the cotton bales'.<sup>20</sup> It was a 'monstrous folly', wrote Layard, 'that we shall be ready to sacrifice the most vital interest of our country, India, our position as a first class power, the influences that we have hitherto exercised in the cause of human liberty and civilisation...because some Baski Bazuk have murdered some worthless and unfortunate Bulgarians'.<sup>21</sup> Lytton and his friends had arrived at the conclusion that the British government expected Lytton to prepare the Indian government to make suitable adjustments in the traditional policy and cooperate with the Foreign Office by steps 'which, if taken, would have placed India completely at the mercy and under the protection of Russia'. Lytton maintained that if the Home government was determined to disregard the fact that Britain 'in India (through India throughout Asia) is a great Mahomedan power and the support and sympathy of our Mahomedan subjects is a great strength and their alienation and mistrust is a great weakness to us', he would rather resign than be forced to carry out the policy.<sup>22</sup> In short, Lytton desired to emerge as the champion of the Muslim world, then pitted against Russian expansion. If Afghanistan refused to cooperate, Lytton would do away with it. His attempts for the maintenance of friendly Afghanistan, his intrigues against the ruler of Kabul, and

18. Stephen to Lytton, 26 November 1878, SteP. Box III.

19. Lytton to Stephen, 15 December 1878, SteP. Box II.

20. Layard to Lytton, 2 January 1879, LayP. Add. Ms. 59130.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Lytton to Stephen, 17 July 1877, SteP. Box I.

finally, the occupation of vantage points beyond the mountain walls formed an 'integral part' of what he called a 'prescription for the treatment of acute symptoms'.<sup>23</sup> But all his prognostications regarding the weakness of Sher Ali's hold upon his country came to nothing. Accordingly, Lytton proceeded to apply his remedy to the 'chronic case'.<sup>24</sup> This involved measures unauthorised by the Home government. Lytton was aware, however, that if Russia could be forced to occupy Balkh and Badakshan as a counter-move, 'we must without hesitation forestall her on the Hindukush'.<sup>25</sup> In such a contingency the Home government, as he understood it, could not have held him back.

There can be no doubt that, regarded as a strategic line, the existing frontier of British India was defective. The theory of awaiting attacks behind mountain ranges was no longer entertained. All the important authorities were agreed that the value of an obstacle, such as a great river or a range, depended upon the command of the points of passage on both sides, and the power of operating at will on either side of the obstacle.<sup>26</sup> Thus it was difficult to dismiss the observation of Lytton that the triangle formed by Kabul, Ghazni and Jalalabad constituted an impregnable strategic position, which 'whenever the moment of collision arrives must find us in possession of it as friends or allies of the Afghans if possible, but firmly established there in any case'.<sup>27</sup> That being the central bastion and the principal line of defence, it remained to be seen how the flanks and the outposts of the scientific frontier were to be determined. The uprising of Yakub Beg of Yarkand had offered Mayo an untapped market with immense potentialities. Wakhan, which commanded a short route to Yarkand, had considerable commercial and strategic importance. Accordingly, Mayo did all he could to extend the territory of Afghanistan in order to include the whole of the upper Oxus within the dominion of Sher Ali. Northbrook was more eager to open the Kashmir route to Yarkand. Unable to carry the Afghan alliance with him, he attempted to outflank Kabul by making independent arrangements with the Mirs of Wakhan and Badakshan. But when Lytton came to India the

23. Lytton to Cranbrook, 22 September 1878, LyP. 518/3.

24. *Ibid.*

25. 'Frontier of India', Minute by Viceroy, 4 September 1878, LyP. 10.

26. *Ibid.*

27. *Ibid.*

failure of the Yarkand project was universally acknowledged in official circles. The new Viceroy was not slow to realise that Wakhan ought to drift away into the hands of the power which commanded the country north of the mountains. 'To oppose an obstacle of trade,' he wrote, 'which we ourselves cannot develop or control, would be neither generous nor wise; and, on the other hand, the more we stop Russia's southern advance, the more desirable it seems to be to give her every facility for expanding eastwards'.<sup>28</sup> Further, it would be impossible, Lytton argued, to move across the ridge militarily and establish British control firmly in Sirikul and the valleys leading to Kashgar without being gradually drawn into regions 'where we have no interests to defend'.<sup>29</sup> Hence the ultimate boundary of British India, in Lytton's scheme of things, was to be delineated from the Karakoram to the Baroghil passes. Examining the existing strategic positions of Britain and Russia in Central Asia, Lytton wrote :

Russia has at present in Central Asia an excellent mountain frontier from Bokhara eastward where it would probably be very difficult to attack her on her own ground, were we ever obliged to cross and attack. We are entitled to claim a similar material guarantee and from Herat to the North-Eastern extremity of Cashmir, our great continuous watershed seems to indicate the natural defensive bulwark of British India. If we take our stand along the line with a sufficient margin north of it to leave us in command of passes on North sides, our position will be sufficiently strong for all defensive purposes.<sup>30</sup>

The western flank of that Central bastion was to be commanded by the Arabian Sea and the desert of Baluchistan. Indeed, the defence system of British India, according to Lytton, was to include two distinct lines, the outer forming the recognised frontier of the country, and the inner following the Hindu Kush and the head of the Helmund and thence down the river to Girishk and Kandahar.<sup>31</sup> The real point of difficulty in the choice of the line, however, lay at Herat. The military, political and financial considerations were to be most carefully weighed. The objections to a military occupation of Herat were self-evident. But the strategic position of Herat was

28. Lytton to Salisbury, 24 March 1876, SalP.

29. 'Frontier of India', by Lytton, 4 September 1878, LyP. 10.

30. Lytton to Salisbury, 14 March 1876, SalP.

31. 'Frontier of India', by Lytton, 4 September 1878, LyP. 10.

so commanding, and its probable influence on Russian progress in Central Asia was so momentous that imperial considerations outweighed all such objections<sup>32</sup>. Thus no one—not even Northbrook—was indifferent to its fate. So long as the policy of the Government of India was geared to a friendly and united Afghanistan, the British saw to it that Herat remained, along with other outlying Afghan provinces, under the effective authority of Kabul. In fact, Mayo worked accordingly, and sought to extend Afghan sovereignty over both the Oxus and Murghab valleys. Northbrook was indifferent to Afghan rights in the north-east, and doubted Sher Ali's ability to hold Herat. Consequently, he attempted to deal with the Mirs of Wakhan and Badakshan directly and established communication with Herat through the British minister in Teheran.<sup>33</sup> Lytton, once committed to a policy for the disintegration of Afghanistan, sought to consolidate British positions in western Afghanistan by engineering the establishment of a separate state composed of Merv and Herat.

The chief obstacle in the determination of British claims lay in the absence of definite geographical and topographical knowledge. There were inaccurate maps that led to much confusion in diplomacy. The xenophobic opposition of the native population to European explorers was a serious problem<sup>34</sup>. Besides, there was in Central Asia no well-defined concept of sovereignty. Buchanan, for example, had found it very difficult to establish Afghan claims as the existing maps as well as the accounts of travellers supported the assertion of the Russian Foreign Ministry that the sands along the Oxus inhabited by nomadic Turkomans did not belong to the province of Balkh<sup>35</sup>. As against such assertions the Indian government found it hard to maintain that there were no ferries on the river under the command of Bukhara and that no village on its left bank was subjected to her<sup>36</sup>. Further to the West, the Ersari Turkomans, who were encamped along the Oxus as far as Kojah Saleh, were acknowledged subjects of Bukhara; the Salar Turkomans of Andkoi were almost independent; while the Sarok Turkomans

32. *Ibid.*

33. 'The Afghan question and the Duke of Argyll', by H. Grey, LyP. 517/9.

34. See relevant papers in M.P. 5.

35. Buchanan to Mayo, 3 July 1871, B.P. Out letter : 1871.

36. *Ibid.*

had a nominal dependence upon Persia<sup>37</sup>. Yet, in so far as the European powers were aware of their own respective interests, diplomacy made its way through the twilight of Central Asian geography.

The primary cause that was expected to be served by diplomacy was commercial interests. On this score the interest shown by the administrators and diplomats in the Oxus basin and Wakhan may be remembered. It was believed that the Oxus was to form the main artery of trade between British India and the countries to the north and to the north-east as well as China. To keep this essential line to a potential market untouched by the protectionist tariff of Russia was considered by Mayo a matter of first priority. Northbrook determined to open the Kashmir route to Yarkand even at the expense of Afghan interests<sup>38</sup>. Lytton was alive to the impracticability of the Yarkand overtures and confined his moves, in respect of commerce, to the Kandahar-Meshed line. It was argued that trade between Kandahar and India was capable of vast expansion, given a settled government and a railway system. 'As regards British exports, Manchester goods could be delivered,' wrote the Commander-in-Chief, 'at Kandahar at the rate at which similar goods are now laid at Lahore. This, I take it, means the absolute control of the trade with northern and eastern Persia and of that with Central Asia. Commercially, Kandahar, the natural emporium of trade, appears to be necessary to us.'<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, in search of an informal empire the Indian government extended its eyes as far as Mesopotamia and Constantinople. It was well known that the British position in Baghdad was supreme. The British political mission in that city, steam navigation in the Tigris, the British gun-boats meandering from the head of the Persian gulf to Basra, the British command of the Gulf and British trade and finances between Baghdad and Bombay had invested Britain with a dominant position in Mesopotamia. It was feared that Mesopotamia might gradually drift into a critical position owing to its isolation from the Porte, its proximity to Persia and the possible break-up of the Turkish Empire. Britain had substantial interests and responsibilities in the Euphrates Valley. The British officer at Baghdad was the political agent in Turkish Arabia, who, according to Temple, was the

37. Memorandum, undated 1873, by Rawlinson, F.O. 539/10, p. 25.

38. Salisbury to Northbrook, 30 December 1874, N.P. 19.

39. Confidential Minute by His Excellency, Commander-in-chief, India, LyP. 10.

only important political functionary of the area in frequent correspondence with the Turkish authorities. Much of the Baghdad trade was financed at Bombay. In fact, British political interests, it was maintained, were extraordinarily strong from the debouches of the Shatt-el-Arab into the Persian Gulf upto Basra and even upto Baghdad owing to the secure base of the British Navy in the Persian Gulf. Recommending a hard line against Russia, Temple suggested that if timely precautions were not taken British interests might be adversely affected. On the contrary, if the British were to hold the two cities of Baghdad and Basra it would be very productive. 'The canal irrigation system of the highest historical celebrity', Temple recommended warmly, 'would be gradually restored, our engineers would soon make the rivers into highways of inland navigation. Population would fast congregate and multiply on the fertile banks under circumstances so changed, the project of Euphrates valley railway would be resuscitated and whatever British interest might thus be established would rest on the natural basis of the Sea'.<sup>40</sup>

British trade in Persia underwent a major change due to increased facilities afforded by steam navigation both in the Caspian Sea and in the Persian Gulf and as a result of the Turkish war. It appeared that the possession of Batoum by Russia did not, contrary to all expectations, draw the Persian transit trade entirely to its own territory. It was, however, believed that with the port of Batoum in her possession and with a railway line between the Black Sea and the Caspian, Russia would so frame her customs regulations as to tempt merchants back to the Tiflis route. In order to counteract this possible Russian ascendancy it was desired that Turkey ought to construct roads and a communication system from Alexandretta, Aleppo and Diarbekr to Bitlis branching thence to Erzeroum. Further, it was felt that the advantages of the British trade in the Persian Gulf derived from steam navigation were counterbalanced by the difficulties of long and mountainous routes to Ispahan of 450 miles and to Teheran of 700 miles. Despite these disadvantages it was recorded that the British competed successfully with Russian trade at least upto Ispahan and even as far as Teheran in some articles. In this context the Karoon river was desired to be opened for steam navigation and a determined tone was recommended by the British Minister in Teheran to be adopted by the British government towards

40. Temple to Lytton, undated November 1877, Temp. 6.

the Shah in order to force the issue. On this score it might be asserted, wrote River Thomson, that the British having maintained and fostered trade in the Persian Gulf for fifty years, suppressed piracy and maintained full security on the Persian coast, had reasons to expect a right that she would not be conspicuously excluded from a natural highway of trade with the interior of Persia. He insisted that the British government ought to take its stand on the British treaty with Persia which had conferred upon them the privileges to trade freely throughout Persia. It was believed that the future main line of commerce would probably pass from Constantinople by way of Diarbekr, Mosul and Kermanshan to Ispahan and Sind. The branches of this line could be extended, it was added, to the Mediterranean via Alexandretta and Diarbekr. Moreover, Thomson stressed that good wagon roads should be constructed from Karkook to Baghdad to tap the Tigris trade, from Ispahan to Teheran in order to exploit the commercial possibilities of the central and eastern Provinces of Persia and from Kerman to Bandar Abbas and eventually to Afghanistan and the Punjab.<sup>41</sup>

Little attention was paid to the unimpressive returns of trade. Perhaps, the best finds and prizes in Asia had already been won; but there was no lack of interest in scraping the bottom of the barrel. True, there was less enthusiasm in Britain than in India over the entire question of trade in Central Asia. It was, at best, they argued, a penny-halfpenny affair and it could conveniently be left to the Russians to civilize the tribes of Central Asia. In India, however, there was a strong feeling for it. It was but natural, for it was Indian merchandise that sought an expanding market in Central Asia.

Afghanistan, however, did not merely provide local problems of commercial and military expansion. Its relationship to the high politics of Europe was equally typical of the complexities of imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century. It was a problem of some magnitude to the policy-makers in London to see that Anglo-Afghan tensions in Central Asia did not stand in the way of the global interests of the British Foreign Office. The weakness of the Liberals in this respect was clearly discernible. Apart from the internal preoccupations of a reforming ministry, there were successive external complications which kept the Foreign Office busy. In Europe the

41. Temple to Salisbury, 11 February 1878; 16 February 1878; 11 March 1878; 7 April 1878; all in Temp. 7.

Franco-Prussian war and the advances of Russia in the area of the Black Sea caused Britain to regard with dismay the latter's increasing influence in international politics. Shortly after war had been declared between France and Prussia, Granville found that Britain was unable to satisfy either party. The French ambassador in London resentfully described the British policy as 'cold, very cold', and claimed that the old alliance between Britain and France had been forgotten.<sup>42</sup> The Alabama issue was brewing, while the dispute between the U.S.A. and Canada over fishing rights was beginning to assume an ugly aspect, as the Dominion government adopted a rigid policy towards New England's fishermen. The Foreign Office watched apprehensively lest Bismarck should take revenge upon Britain for her alleged failure to restrain France by establishing intimate relations with Russia<sup>43</sup>. During the American Civil War Russia had shown sympathy towards the North and because of this it was feared that the United States might favour her in any dispute with Britain. In search of goodwill, the Foreign Office found in Russia potentially the least offensive antagonist. Central Asia was the only area where there were any differences between the two and it was believed that a frank understanding over mutual interests would stamp out all the 'sparks that might produce a fire in the East'.<sup>44</sup> Clarendon had little sympathy for the feeling in India over the prohibitive commercial system of Russia, and was disposed to believe in 'the possibilities of Russian moderation'.<sup>45</sup> Granville, his successor in the Foreign Office, was determined to keep on as good terms as possible with Russia, 'ready to act with her in present little matters and prepared to do the same when greater issues are at stake'.<sup>46</sup> Also the Liberals under Gladstone went a very long way down Cobden's road. There was very little of the imperial consciousness which was to mark the succeeding ministry. New Zealand, Canada and Australia looked upon Gladstone's unimaginative colonial policy as tantamount to unfriendly acts.<sup>47</sup> On the Central Asian question the Liberals showed a characteristic indecision

42. E. Fitzmaurice, 'The life of Granville etc.', *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 37-39.

43. Russell to Granville, 1 April 1870, GranP. 79.

44. Clarendon to Buchanan, 3 March 1869, B.P. In letters : 1869.

45. Clarendon to Buchanan, 23 June 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

46. Granville to Russell, 11 August 1870, GranP. 69.

47. D.M. Schurman, 'Imperial Defence, 1868-87', unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Cambridge, 1955, ch. I.

and an ever-ready disposition to come to a negotiated settlement at the expense of Indian interests. The only point, it was argued, on which differences could exist with Russia was her greater proximity to India. 'If our public are not made uneasy on that point,' wrote Clarendon, 'I believe that our relations with Russia will be on a sounder and more friendly footing than they have been for many years—more so than before the Crimean War'.<sup>48</sup> In keeping with the feelings of the Secretary of State, the Russian advance on Bukhara failed to engender any general sense of apprehension in London. In India, on the contrary, it was much talked of. But then, 'India,' Clarendon was to boast, 'is now practically as well as theoretically governed from London'.<sup>49</sup> It was believed that the British people might dislike the advance of the Russian power in the east, but if it was a question of fighting and not merely words 'neither the present government nor any that may follow would be able to repeat the armed interference of fifteen years ago'.<sup>50</sup> Thus, despite the repeated warnings of Buchanan and Loftus about the 'vast projects' of the Russians in Central Asia, the Liberal administration continued to believe in the pacific disposition of Russia. Mayo's hands were firmly tied by the Home government, the Indian government was discouraged from extending the sphere of British commitments in Afghanistan and even Mayo's vague assurances to Sher Ali were closely scrutinised.

In 1873 even Northbrook was urged to be cautious. True, technically Argyll did not instruct Northbrook to withhold any assurances he had desired to give to the Amir's envoy. But all the qualifications that were insisted upon by Northbrook, as a result, produced upon the mind of the Amir a wholly different impression from that which would have been produced by more definite assurances. There was just that sort of attenuation, which might be expressed as 'a difference between drinking a glass of Champagne fresh out of the bottle and drinking it after it had been allowed to stand for a while'.<sup>51</sup> The temper of the Foreign Office was best reflected in the course of the protracted negotiations between the Home government and its Russian counterpart. They were anxious

48. Clarendon to Buchanan, 3 March 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

49. Stanley to Buchanan, 16 September 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

50. Stanley to Buchanan, 16 December 1869, B.P. In letter : 1869.

51. Hansard, CCXL III, 5 December 1873, p. 707.

not to give Gortchakoff the impression that 'we doubt him'<sup>52</sup>. 'He is far from omnipotent,' wrote Clarendon, 'at a distance of 2000 miles from St. Petersburg between encroaching natives, ambitious generals, greedy merchants and Moscow newspapers.'<sup>53</sup> So far as the negotiations of Granville and Gortchakoff went, 'it amounted to an understanding that Russia might extend up to Oxus.'<sup>54</sup> Besides, Britain and Russia agreed to recognise some territory as neutral between the possessions of the two countries. This should be the limit of these possessions and be respected by them, and Afghanistan, or rather the dominions of Sher Ali, should be that territory. 'We do not agree about the Russians in Central Asia. I acknowledge that they are pushing on,' wrote Granville, 'but I cannot imagine why—and you cannot tell me. It is possibly, the story of the old Duke of Devonshire and his Steward, the Russians taking the Steward's side: "Your Grace must buy that field." "Why must I buy that field?" "Because it immediately adjoins your Grace's estate." "But when I have bought that field some other will immediately join my estate!"'<sup>55</sup> In reply the Indian secretary refused to be dragged into any speculation over the reasons for Russian expansion. 'We need not trouble ourselves,' he wrote, 'on the why—the question is what damage can the Russians do to us when she is coterminous? Of course, in case of war she will fight with all weapons and if she can bother us in India she will do it. Therefore, I should like to have a buffer between us, if one can be kept up. That is all.'<sup>56</sup>

Salisbury, despite all his initial sympathy with an active policy, was soon to view the problem of Central Asia along these lines. He made light of the Russian military advance towards the Indian frontier, advising one who feared it to use 'large scale maps'.<sup>57</sup> He was to confine himself to measures calculated to prevent the embarrassments that the Afghans were capable of causing the British upon the frontier. 'Russia can offer to the Afghans the loot of India;' he wrote, 'we, if we desired to make a competing offer, promise nothing in Turkistan to loot.'<sup>58</sup>

52. Clarendon to Buchanan, 2 March 1870, ClarP. (R).

53. *Ibid.*

54. Argyll to Buchanan, 2 March 1870, ClarP. (R).

55. Granville to Argyll, 6 January 1872, GranP. 51.

56. Argyll to Granville, 10 January 1872, GranP. 51.

57. Quoted in Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p, 125.

58. *Ibid.*

One characteristic feature that distinguished Salisbury from his contemporaries was his ability to identify specific issues of a general problem. Salisbury was convinced that it was not feasible for Great Britain to attempt single handed another Crimean war. But it was possible, he thought, to find a bridge over which to retreat and he was confident that the Russians were willing enough to do so. He regretted that the Turks, 'encouraged by fanatics here' and intrigues 'from Berlin', imagined that the Russians were paralysed and refused to see reason. The Tsar, on the other hand, committed to the 'unlucky Moscow Speech to fight it out for the Christians' and, encouraged by Gladstone's agitation, was left with no choice other than to make a crusade 'as profitable and as inexpensive as possible'.<sup>59</sup> In an attempt to find a solution Salisbury came to the conclusion that the independence and integrity of the Turkish Empire in the old sense could no longer be continued. He would try, he claimed, to retain some of the Porte's territories in Europe in order to cover the strategic position of Constantinople. But it was necessary, Salisbury emphasised, to avoid renewed atrocities and recurring interventions. Even after the treaty of San Stefano and despite a grave political situation in Europe, Salisbury retained his confidence in diplomacy as an effective instrument to avert war and believed that the war could still be avoided provided the Russian statesmen did not allow their soldiers 'to run away with them'. Indeed, the evolution of British policy during that period of crisis was the personal contribution of Salisbury. By the turn of the 1870's he could survey the situation with much satisfaction. As diplomacy immobilised powers, Salisbury seemed mightily pleased with the success of his own calculations: Bismarck dared not attempt anything for fear of German socialism; Russia was afraid to move beyond the Rubicon; Italy was vexed and powerless; France was lured by the prospect of getting some 'cheap gold to gild the republican eagle' and the Indian troops 'in possession of Cyprus for Britain, possibly to restore the Jews to the Holy land with Jewish money and English enterprise'.<sup>60</sup>

The shift of priorities in British foreign policy since the Conference of Constantinople coincided with the growing detachment of Salisbury with regard to the Russian activities in Central Asia. In

59. Salisbury to Lytton, 25 September 1877, SalP.

60. Temple to Lytton, 12 July 1877, Temp. 6.

repeated instructions to the Indian government, he urged the necessity of caution and the relative importance of Quetta and Kandahar as opposed to Kabul and the Hindukush.

It was believed that German 'militarism' and 'English industrial freedom' were not 'meant for permanent co-operation'. Derby saw 'with alarm' the position that Bismarck appeared to be taking up in European politics, 'which, if it continues,' he wrote, 'will be as little compatible with European freedom as the First French Empire'.<sup>61</sup> It was not 'our business, to put an end to these little jealousies', the outcome of which, 'may be to our advantage rather than otherwise'.<sup>62</sup> Apprehensions about the potentialities of Germany were to form the new creed of the British Foreign Office and Salisbury, on his return from the Conference at Constantinople, was a sincere convert. Neither Germany nor Russia was happy with the *status quo*. But while the Russian demands were, if they materialised, to affect the fate of the Central Asian Khanates and the European dominions of the Porte, the Germans were apt to alter the balance of things nearer home.<sup>63</sup> The new complexion of the whole situation called for a reassessment of the existing policy.

It was believed that in the then unsettled situation in Europe any overture for settlement with Russia of outstanding problems would not be viewed with displeasure. Indeed, the recent aggrandisement of Germany caused Britain to look upon Russia as 'our possible, perhaps our only effective, ally under certain contingencies'.<sup>64</sup> Disraeli was inclined to construct some concerted movement to preserve peace in Europe like 'Pam did when he baffled France and expelled the Egyptians from Syria'. In fact, apprehensions about Germany led Disraeli to toy with the idea of an alliance with Russia and Austria, to which France might be called upon to accede.<sup>65</sup> In January 1876 France offered to collaborate with Britain to establish some sort of control over Egyptian finances. Disraeli saw in the proposals great possibilities while Derby added in the margin of Disraeli's note : 'I see the face which Bismarck would make if this were done'.<sup>66</sup> As Burne confirmed in his letter to Lytton from

61. Derby to Loftus, 8 March 1875, Private/Russia/Loftus, DerP.

62. Derby to Loftus, 7 October 1874, Private/Russia/Loftus, DerP.

63. Salisbury to Lytton, 25 September 1877, SalP.

64. Temple to Lytton, 12 July 1877, TemP. 6.

65. Disraeli to Derby, 6 May 1878, Private/Cabinet/Beaconsfield, DerP.

66. *Ibid.*

London, the German alliance had been a dead letter. 'The English People', complained Burne, 'won't have it'.<sup>67</sup> Derby had been unable to synthesise the old policy and the new. Salisbury was a successful mid-wife and the new shift in British foreign policy was presented in terms of the *old jargon*.

Thus, there was a natural disposition to belittle the threat of Russian expansion. 'If Russia is to be judged by the tone of her press,' it was maintained, 'then there can be no doubt that our Indian Empire is threatened by her and that we must look not only for secret intrigues but covert aid to our enemies and undisguised hostility'.<sup>68</sup> There was, however, some doubt as to whether the Russian Press was representative of the views of the Tsar and his statesmen. It was believed that both Afghanistan and Persia were unable to reform and there was no serious inclination to rely on them exclusively. Although Persia had a more stable foundation it was taken for granted that Persia was ultimately to be reduced to a state of dependency on Russia. But that evil day could be postponed. Hence, it was not felt judicious to 'keep well with the Amir by all means' for that would mean, as Salisbury wrote, 'keeping ill with Persia. Sher Ali grumbles whenever we show the faintest kindness to Persia'.<sup>69</sup> Northbrook was urged by the Home authorities to put pressure on the Amir to accept a British agent. But it was only if Russia got both to Meshed and Merv that Salisbury would resort to force. In fact, in such a contingency he could hardly have allowed Afghanistan to 'remain as it is now'.<sup>70</sup> In short, Salisbury was eager to view the problem presented by the Russian restlessness in Central Asia in its totality. As a satisfactory solution to the problem, he would advocate the strengthening of British positions in southern and western Afghanistan and southern Persia, the extension of railway communications to Herat, and the cessation of jealousy and excitement in the Middle East so as to minimise the possibilities of energetic counter-moves by Russia in the immediate future, and finally, a partition of Central Asia with Russia. Thus, a strong Afghan kingdom was of no use to British interests. Nor was a policy of war and disintegration. For him,

67. Burne to Lytton, 5 August 1878, LyP. 518/9.

68. Cranbrook to Lytton, 5 August 1878, LyP. 518/3.

69. Salisbury to Derby, 1 August 1874, Private/Cabinet/Beaconsfield, DerP.

70. Salisbury to Derby, 10 November 1874, Private/Cabinet/Beaconsfield, DerP.

the Afghan friendship could be meaningful only for an offensive thrust against Russia. But Salisbury never contemplated such an operation. The occupation of Merv was an untenable liability and Salisbury was willing to allow Russia to civilize those barren lands if such a process became absolutely necessary. Thus, Salisbury did not see the advantages of keeping the routes to Kashgar open. On the contrary, he argued, the sooner the Russians were brought into collision with the Chinese the better. 'Neither will be able to conquer the other,' he wrote, 'while the effort will drain the resources and paralyse the power of the two tiresome neighbours.'<sup>71</sup> As to the correspondence with Kauffman, he found nothing objectionable and the Foreign Office's modifications of the proposed remonstrance to Russia were calculated to weaken 'the force of what proceeds'.<sup>72</sup> Although the reply of the Russian Foreign Ministry contained 'a string of verbose generalities' and 'no kind of assurances that the correspondences with Kabul will be discontinued',<sup>73</sup> it was presumed that the note should be regarded as closing the discussion to which General Kauffman's proceedings had given rise.<sup>74</sup> As regards Lytton's attempt to raise a holy war against Russia in Central Asia, the India Office was firm. 'As Her Majesty is neutral in the present conflict,' it was maintained, 'Her Government can give no countenance, direct or indirect, to such an undertaking, and they could not view without dissatisfaction any action on the part of the Amir which might, if he met with a reverse, place the integrity of his own dominions in peril.'<sup>75</sup> As to the intended operation on Merv, Salisbury stated that the Home government acknowledged the 'legitimate right of Russia to punish Turkomans for Brigandage' and that on the British maps Kizzil Arvat had been included in Russian territory.<sup>76</sup> Merv 'would bring Russia neither revenue nor subjects, nor security. Save as a basis for further advance towards India,' wrote Salisbury, 'the permanent occupation of Merv would be a needless and wanton waste both of money and military force; and

71. Marginal notes in Lytton to Salisbury, 5 April 1877, PTI3. Also see note by Salisbury on Kashgar Mission, PTI 3, pp. 239-41.
72. Minute paper, letter from Foreign Office, 12 March 1877, PTI 3, p. 217.
73. Minute paper, letter from Foreign Office, 3 April 1877, PTI 3, p. 279.
74. *Ibid.* Also 75, Secretary of State to the Viceroy, 28 June 1877, No. 49, PTI 3, p. 279.
75. Secretary of State to the Viceroy, No. 68 (Secret), 16 October 1877, PTI 3, p. 472.
76. *Ibid.*

there are very few persons who believe that an invasion of India is possible for Russia, or is contemplated by the boldest of Russian statesmen.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, Anglo-Russian dialogue initiated a new system of arrangement in Central Asia. Under this Britain undertook to honour the independence of Afghanistan while Russia, for her part, agreed to do the same as regards Bukhara. Dwelling on the new obligation in Afghanistan Salisbury observed that any violation on the part of the British of the territory of Afghanistan would be moving forward and would give the Russians a fair right to ask questions, although Salisbury was not willing to admit 'that Quetta is in the same position, though we have no present intention of meddling with it'.<sup>78</sup> As the Russian mission moved to Kabul in 1878 the British government drifted into a new set of negotiations with Russia over a number of questions on which Russia demanded a say on the basis of Derby's memorandum. As a result, Lytton found himself saddled with instructions not to advance to Kabul under any circumstances, not to make any arrangement calculated to give umbrage to the Russians, to deal with Afghanistan on the agency question as a distinct local issue, to treat the reception of the Russian mission in Kabul as a Foreign Office matter, to confine the rectification of the frontier to the mountain passes and, if need be, towards Kandahar in the south, and to let the hole in the defence system of Herat be plugged by the Foreign Office's Persian diplomacy. Finally, Dufferin was authorised in 1879 to say that the British did not intend to remain beyond Jalalabad, Shutugarden and Kandahar. Of course, for such useful information the British ambassador was to insist that 'we must get what we want in Europe'.<sup>79</sup>

From the vantage point of India, Lytton viewed both the Eastern Question and the Afghan problem from an altogether different perspective. He held that considerations of humanity in general could not constitute the basis of the foreign policy of any government. Hence, he had utter contempt for the pro-Christian sympathies of British public opinion. He stoutly contested the merit of British partnership in what he called the 'Insurance Company against Bismarkian Burglaries'.<sup>80</sup> Lytton claimed that France was a natural

77. Salisbury to Lytton, 5 August 1877, SalP.

78. Cranbrook to Lytton, 10 November 1879, CranP.

79. Lytton to Burne, 4 April 1878, LyP. 10.

80. Lytton to Rawlinson, 28 July 1877, LayP. Add. 39164.

enemy of Great Britain, having always antagonistic interests. It was true, Lytton maintained, that France, enfeebled by Germany, could no longer pose a serious threat to the British empire. Yet it was still her legitimate interest to compete with Britain vigorously for the general supremacy of the seas. Lytton was, however, most apprehensive of the radical republicans of France whose ascendancy to power, according to him, would have meant that 'you have at your very doors a powerful socialist propaganda in sympathy with and stimulating the most mischievous aspirations of democracy, in Britain'. 'When the Reds finally succumbed to the Imperialists', Lytton added, 'you will have French Caesarism on the throne again accompanied by all the old political phenomena so disquieting to Europe, and especially to England'.<sup>81</sup> An alliance with Russia offered to Lytton even worse nightmares. Russia, according to him, was a representative of political despotism and religious fanaticism and was the determined rival of Britain in the East. Lytton believed that she coveted Central Asia in order to compensate her Asiatic poverty. In her attempt to stand up as a maritime and commercial power Russia was desirous of annexing the ports and the sea boards of the Pacific and the Mediterranean. Lytton was disposed to consider any gain for Russia as a loss for Britain.<sup>82</sup>

Thus, by a process of elimination, the prospects of a German alliance stood out in bright colours in Lytton's scheme of things. He believed that Germany was the historical ally of Great Britain associated by 'race, tradition, religion, mutual character, by dynasty, common interests and close association in commercial undertakings'.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, Lytton found fullest community of interests and sympathy between Germany and Britain. Germany did not threaten, Lytton declared, either British maritime supremacy or the Indian empire. In fact, Lytton was almost lyrical about a German alliance. 'The German colonists settling down where the Englishmen's enterprise has opened the way for him', runs Lytton's ode to Germany, 'become the most assiduous agriculturists, the most frugal and laborious mechanics, the sturdiest merchants, founding firms which shun speculation, and grow slowly but gradually to oust our own impulsive and adventurist commercial houses'.<sup>84</sup> Moreover, Lytton added,

81. *Ibid.*

82. *Ibid.*

83. *Ibid.*

84. *Ibid.*

Germany could never become a military power in the true sense of the term. Although it had the finest military organisation and a strong aristocracy, 'it has no element of a permanent military nation—martial proclivities and territorial ambition of its people'.<sup>85</sup> In his more serious moments Lytton recognised the possibility that modern Germany, in possession of the most efficient war machine in Europe, could not remain permanently content without being also a maritime and colonising power.<sup>86</sup> But such presentiments did not deter him from pursuing his basic objective: the need to defend the Turks against all comers. He was aware that for want of national support the traditional policy might prove to be quite impracticable. He conceded that Turkey was unluckily the 'wrong man in the right place', and that she had against herself 'all the old maids and all the parsons in England'. Evidently, Lytton believed that the country would not sanction another Crimean war. Yet his hostility towards the anti-Turkish policy of the Cabinet made him opt for a somewhat irrational stand on the Eastern Question. For example, he was inclined to view the Danubian provinces not as states but as 'merely ethnic conglomerations' and he asserted that this 'lump of all the bad lots' could not stand without the support and protection of some great European power. That power, he feared, was invariably Russia. In order to obviate the resulting inconveniences, Lytton would have liked the British Government to approve and encourage Germany's interests in the Danubian side of the Eastern Question.<sup>87</sup> Layard from Constantinople continued to harp on the importance of the British government coming forward to check the progress of Russia, to settle the Eastern Question and to establish British influence in Central Asia. 'We are essentially a Mohammedan power', he maintained, 'and I cannot conceive anything more likely to strike a blow to our dominion and prestige in India than if we were to allow Russia to conquer Constantinople and to drive out the Sultan'.<sup>88</sup> In fact, Layard did all that was possible to impress upon the Home government the immense importance of preventing Batoum, Kars, Erzeroum and the east of Armenia from falling into Russian hands. He was agreed with Temple, much to the satisfaction of Cranbrook, that the possession of Batoum,

85. Lytton to Cranbrook, 2 February 1878, LyP. (10).

86. Lytton to R. Strachey, 18 November 1879, StrP.

87. Layard to Lytton, 2 August 1877, LyP. 512/9.

88. Temple to Lytton, undated November 1877; 12 July 1877; both in Temp. 6.

commanding the road to Kars, North Persia, Bitlis, Van and Moush would give the Russians authority over the whole of Asia Minor, Azerbaijan and the valleys of the Tigris and the Euphrates. Such a position, Layard added, would be of the 'greatest danger to the Indian Empire and as such to our position as a great power'.<sup>89</sup> Temple emphasised that it was potentially an alternative route to India, whose importance could not be over-estimated because the Suez Canal might be turned impassable for a navy by a few sticks of dynamite placed judiciously. Besides, it was pointed out that Persia had refused to join the war against Turkey despite Russia's offer of territorial compensation after the war.<sup>90</sup> It seemed to the British diplomats at Constantinople and Teheran that the Shah was receptive to the idea of a Muslim alliance with Turkey, Persia and the Muslims of Central Asia along with Great Britain against Russia.

In fact, the eastern lobby impressed upon the Home government the need for forming an alliance with Persia and Turkey against Russia, and painted in bright colours the feasibility of such a combination in order to provide the necessary breakthrough in British diplomacy. Lytton held that British policy towards Turkey had adversely affected the Indian Muslims. Temple had kept himself informed about the nature and content of Muslim opinion on the Turkish war. There was much speculation with regard to the political future of the Porte and the Indian government recognised in the public discussions a new and growing political force that might agitate the Indian empire. 'If three Turks landed at Bombay with a message from the Sultan commanding the faithful in India', Lytton wrote, 'to unfurl the green flag and proclaim a jihad against the British Government every man of them would obey the mandate though many of them may do so reluctantly.'<sup>91</sup> The prospect of such a move, especially in view of the existence of a combination of Muslim States on the frontier, could not be ignored with cheerful indifference.

Salisbury was not in favour of ignoring Indian interests. But his solution to the problem lay in diplomatising the issues rather than in a further extension of commitments. He seemed too eager to make the issues involving the Khanates and the Emirates of Central Asia into international bargaining counters. Perhaps, if his plan were put into operation, he could have secured Kandahar and Herat

89. Temple to Salisbury, 11 February 1878; 7 ApI

90. Lytton to Stephen, 24 June 1877, SteP. Box I

91. Dufferin to Salisbury; 1 January 1879, SalP.

as material guarantees against the threat of Russian subversion. But such a remedy would surely have involved a rupture with the Kabul ruler.

It is true that the Indian Viceroy was miserably out of date in his knowledge of the realities of European diplomacy and overlooked the significance of the emergence of Germany as a military power. But he was right in so far as he realised that a bargain could be struck along the land frontier of a continental power only if it was supported by a strong military line. The British position in the Persian Gulf was impregnable. But so was the Russian front on the Attreck and in the direction of Balkh. To depend on the resistance of the Turkomans was a good strategy ; but as an exclusive means of offence it was not enough. Besides, the security of Herat was guaranteed by the preponderant influence of the British in the Persian Gulf. It was the vulnerable points at the Chitral-Hunza complex and the Kabul-Ghazni-Jalalabad triangle that called for the greatest vigilance. Perhaps Salisbury was thinking in terms of an eventual partition of Central Asia with the other European power.<sup>92</sup> But so was Lytton. The problem lay, as Lytton saw it, in taking the initiative in defining the line of ultimate contact bearing British interests in mind, and not being compelled to accept a line forced upon them by the strategic calculations of Kauffman. But if Lytton's intellect could always be relied upon to perceive the core of an argument, Salisbury could be depended on to see that British interests were unimpaired by the prejudices of any traditional policy. The European complications necessitated a re-orientation of the foreign policy of Britain. The compromise offered by the Foreign Secretary was to rule the day. Thus, despite Lytton's initial rebellion, British interests, as defined by the Cabinet, were to decide the issue in the final analysis.

Mayo was rudely shaken by Northbrook's cold demeanour. As a financier Northbrook seemed unduly concerned with immediate returns on all imperial investments. He failed to appreciate the Afghan political institutions in the context of a gradual social and political transformation. Thus by the time Lytton arrived in India the temper of the Kabul Durbar was no longer favourable to a British alliance. The Bukharan foreign policy, on the other hand, had become an effective instrument of Kauffman's imperial calculations. It is true that Lytton came with the mandate of the Conservative government to reorganise Afghan relations on a surer basis in view of, and in keeping with, the wider imperial interests of the Foreign Office. But Lytton seemed too aggressive in his moves. He was determined to force the issue during his Viceroyalty, and when the Home government was found to be unwilling, he initiated a rupture with the Afghan prince by means of a series of unauthorised moves. His goal was a disintegrated Afghanistan. He failed, partially due to the non-cooperation of the Home government, but largely due to the nature of the Afghan resistance. Lytton was conscious of the social and political transformation that was taking place in Khelat and Afghanistan. Socially, Afghanistan was 'at the moment', he wrote, 'much in the same condition as... France in the 13th Century. The country is passing (under the inevitable turbulent conditions of such a process), from the tribal into the feudal system : and this must increase the authority of the King' and diminish 'the power of the Sirdars if the country is to follow the natural salutary course of historic development and eventually, consolidate itself into an orderly social organisation'.<sup>93</sup> In fact, the notion, current in Britain as well as in India, that Afghanistan was composed of many small tribes under the sway of different chiefs, without forming a compact empire, was an utterly misleading conception. It had led Auckland to support a discredited family, however sophisticated it might have been in British eyes. Subsequently, of all the Viceroys in India and ministers at home, only Mayo realised the nature of Afghan loyalties. In his attempts to revive the Durrani hegemony or to disintegrate Afghanistan, Lytton backed the wrong horse. Sher Ali died tired of a war. But it was Abdul Rahman, another Barakzai, who was to step into his shoes. It was easy to upset the ruler of Afghanistan by sheer military superiority. But it was impossible to fill the resultant vacuum with British nominees. The four provinces of Kabul,

93. Gladstone to Clarendon, 13 August 1869, ClarP.

Kandahar, Herat and Balkh had a natural tendency to unite. The Dost, Sher Ali and Abdul Rahman were to preside over monotonously similar historical missions.

Taking the Afghan war as a test case, it may be examined whether the Indian government was free to have its own independent foreign policy. True, both Mayo and Lytton went beyond the instructions of the Secretary of State for India. But they could not go as far as they would have liked. The Liberal administration had always been apprehensive of Mayo's commitments in Afghan politics. They feared the emergence of 'old Pam all over again'<sup>94</sup> and Argyll was particular that the unwritten qualifications of the Ambala agreement be faithfully followed. No real friction, however, made itself apparent because of the nature of the initiative that Mayo had in mind. It is a matter of speculation whether Mayo would have remained an obedient representative of the Indian secretary had he, instead of Northbrook, faced Nur Muhammad at Simla; and whether he would have allowed the arbitration of the Seistan dispute to take the course it eventually took. It is, however, all the more doubtful whether he would have got his way after all. Lytton did more than exceed the limits of his instructions. He made some substantial alterations to the fundamentals of the objectives in Afghanistan without consulting his superior, and resorted to intrigues and manipulations in order to achieve his goal. The departure of Chamberlain's mission is illustrative of his intrigues. On 3 August 1878 Cranbrook had sanctioned the authority of the Viceroy to insist upon the reception of a mission as a *sine qua non* condition of sending the mission. No objection was made to Lytton's insistence on 13 August that 'I cannot propose it unless I have authority to insist on it.' It was subsequently arranged that the mission was to leave Peshawar on 16 September. On 13 September a telegram was received from the India Office as follows: 'Official reply to remonstrance from St. Petersburg on way to London. Important to receive this before Chamberlain starts.' Lytton's interpretation of the instruction was remarkably original. The mission was to be independent, he argued, of the remonstrance or the explanations of St. Petersburg and if it was to make any change in the instructions to Chamberlain, he could be informed of the altered decision much before he reached Kabul. It is true that he delayed the departure of the mission from 16 September

94. Lytton to Cranbrook, 10 October 1878, LyP. 518/3.

to 21 September, after which, further delay, he would claim, would have been 'seriously dangerous, and indeed, practically impossible.'<sup>95</sup> There is no doubt that Lytton's initiative forced the hand of the Home government. True, the Cabinet was to find it expedient to support Lytton in public. But the Indian Viceroy was soon to discover that his rebellion was not worth it. His actions were censured officially; his objectives were scrutinised; and his initiative was seriously circumscribed. To cap it all, Salisbury determined not to forgive his disobedient representative. One might even say that it meant the end of Lytton's political ambition, if he had any, in Britain.

Indeed, the role of the man on the spot is an interesting phenomenon in the history of imperial expansion in the late nineteenth century. The remarkable expansion of European powers in the period is often obscured by magnified versions of the local expansive impulses of generals in search of rewards, distinction or glory. The Home governments, especially those endowed with popular institutions, have been presented as victims of these irresponsible adventures on the part of ambitious men posted on the ill-defined frontiers of the empires. In the case of an absolutist government such a mad rush for expansion has been explained away as a built-in mechanism of the system. In the absence of social and political penalties, it has been argued, a successful *fait accompli* was readily approved of without popular scrutiny, while an authorised fiasco could be disowned by an irresponsible executive without a resentful murmur from any corner. The history of Russian expansion in Central Asia is replete with an infinite number of such cases. It may, however, be argued, with the second Afghan war as a test case, that imperial expansion, essentially an arbitrary and authoritarian activity, acquired considerable acceptability even in democratic societies. Political controversies and public debate over the necessity and scope of a particular expansive move at a remote corner of the world did make the life of existing governments somewhat inconvenient. Such political interference made the popular institutions credible: they did not force a general retreat of advancing armies to stationary points on the map held by them in the past. In other words, a successful adventure was always rewarded; a futile military gesture was, in most cases, disavowed. This is true of imperial expansion everywhere notwithstanding differences in social and political ideology.

## *Appendix*

# **The Treaty of Gandamak**

Treaty between the British Government and His Highness Muhammad Yakub Khan, Amir of Afghanistan and its Dependencies, concluded at Gandamak on the 26th May, 1879, by Highness the Amir Muhammad Yakub Khan on his own part, and on the part of the British Government by Major P.L.N. Cavagnari, C.S.I., Political Officer on Special Duty, in virtue of full powers vested in him by the Right Honorable Edward Robert Lytton Bulwer-Lytton, Baron Lytton of Knebworth, and a Baronet, Grand Master of the Most Exalted Order of the Star of India, Knight Grand Cross of the Most Honorable Order of the Bath, Grand Master of the Order of the Indian Empire, Viceroy and Governor-General of India.

The following Articles of a treaty for the restoration of peace and amicable relations have been agreed upon between the British Government and His Highness Muhammad Yakub Khan, Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies :

### **ARTICLE 1**

From the day of the exchange of the ratifications of the present Treaty there shall be perpetual peace and friendship between the British Government on the one part and His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies and his successors, on the other.

### **ARTICLE 2**

His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies engages on the exchange of the ratifications of this Treaty, to publish a full and complete amnesty, absolving all his subjects from any responsibility for intercourse with the British Forces during the War, and to guarantee and protect all persons of whatever degree from any punishment of molestation on that account.

### ARTICLE 3

His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies agrees to conduct his relations with Foreign States, in accordance with the advice and wishes of the British Government. His Highness the Amir will enter into no engagements with Foreign States, and will not take up arms against any Foreign State except with the concurrence of the British Government. On these conditions, the British Government will support the Amir against any foreign aggression with money, arms, or troops, to be employed in whatever manner the British Government may judge best for this purpose. Should British troops at any time enter Afghanistan for the purpose of repelling foreign aggression, they will return to their stations in British territory as soon as the object for which they entered has been accomplished.

### ARTICLE 4

With a view to the maintenance of the direct and intimate relations now established between the British Government and His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and for the better protection of the frontiers of His Highness's dominions, it is agreed that a British Representative shall reside at Kabul, with a suitable escort in a place of residence appropriate to his rank and dignity. It is also agreed that the British Government shall have the right to depute British Agents with suitable escorts to the Afghan frontiers, whenever this may be considered necessary by the British Government in the interests of both States, on the occurrence of any important external fact. His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan may on his part depute an Agent to reside at the Court of His Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General of India, and at such other places in British India as may be similarly agreed upon.

### ARTICLE 5

His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies guarantees the personal safety and honorable treatment of British Agents within his jurisdiction ; and the British Government on its part undertakes that its Agents shall never in any way interfere with the internal administration of His Highness's dominions.

### ARTICLE 6

His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies, undertakes, on behalf of himself and his successors, to offer no

impediment to British Subjects peacefully trading within his dominions so long as they do so with the permission of the British Government, and in accordance with such arrangements as may be mutually agreed upon from time to time between the two Governments.

### ARTICLE 7

In order that the passage of trade between the territories of the British Government and of His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan may be open and uninterrupted, His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan agrees to use his best endeavours to ensure the protection of traders and to facilitate the transit of goods along the well-known customary roads of Afghanistan. These roads shall be improved and maintained in such manner as the two Governments may decide to be most expedient for the general convenience of traffic, and under such financial arrangements as may be mutually determined upon between them. The arrangements made for the maintenance and security of the aforesaid roads, for the settlement of the duties to be levied upon merchandize carried over these roads, and for the general protection and development of trade with, and through the dominions of His Highness, will be stated in a separate Commercial Treaty, to be concluded within one year, due regard being given to the state of the country.

### ARTICLE 8

With a view to facilitate communications between the allied Governments and to aid and develop intercourse and commercial relations between the two countries, it is hereby agreed that a line of telegraph from Kurram to Kabul shall be constructed by and at the cost of the British Government, and the Amir of Afghanistan hereby undertakes to provide for the proper protection of this telegraph line.

### ARTICLE 9

In consideration of the renewal of a friendly alliance between the two States which has been attested and secured by the foregoing Articles, the British Government restores to His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies the towns of Kandahar and Jellalabad, with all the territory now in possession of the British armies, excepting the districts of Kurram, Pishin, and Sibi. His Highness the Amir of Afghanistan and its dependencies agrees on his part that the districts of Kurram and Pishin and Sibi, according to the

limits defined in the schedule annexed,\* shall remain under the protection and administrative control of the British Government : that is to say, the aforesaid districts shall be treated as assigned districts and shall not be considered as permanently severed from the limits of the Afghan kingdom. The revenues of these districts after deducting the charges of civil administration shall be paid to His Highness the Amir.

The British Government will retain in its own hands the control of Khyber and Michni Passes, which lie between the Peshawar and Jellalabad Districts, and of all relations with the independent tribes of the territory directly connected with these Passes.

#### ARTICLE 10

For the further support Highness the Amir in the recovery and maintenance of his legitimate authority, and in consideration of the efficient fulfilment in their entirety of the engagements stipulated by the foregoing Articles, the British Government agrees to pay to His Highness the Amir and to his successors an annual subsidy of six lakhs of Rupees.

Done at Gandamak, this 16th day of May 1879, corresponding with the 4th day of the month of Jamadi-us-sani 1296, A.H.

Amir Muhammad Yakub Khan

N. Cavagnari, Major  
Poltl. Officer on Special Duty  
Lytton.

This treaty was ratified by his Excellency the Viceroy and Governor-General of India at Simla, on Friday, this 30th day of May, 1879.

A.C. Lyall,  
Secy. to the Govt. of India, Foreign Dept.

\*Not reproduced.

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